The Nation.

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Gary Younge

TRAINING IRAQ'S DEATH SQUADS
Spencer Ackerman

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Arthur C. Danto

HILLARY INC.

THE CORPORATE TIES THAT BIND

by ARI BERMAN

JUNE 4, 2007
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EXCHANGE

R.O. BLECHMAN

SDS: The Way the Wind Is Blowing

Oakland, Calif.

■ "The New SDS" by Christopher Phelps [April 16] articulates something a lot of young people are feeling more and more: the bubbling of a new student activism that's just beginning to define our generation. As a national student organizer for SDS and Rainforest Action Network, I see it daily across the country. Social movements come in waves and cycles; the pendulum is swinging back in our direction right now. The student movement has, of course, not yet reached the proportions of the 1930s or '60s, but the depth and sophistication of student organizing is growing and evolving by leaps and bounds. The new student activism is grounded in a vision of participatory democracy, student power and liberation. It seeks to be relevant, thoughtful and strategic, by taking intergenerational organizing and mentorship seriously, without nostalgia for the past. Despite the complexities of taking on the name SDS—both the opportunities and the baggage—we are a new organization for a new generation. SDS is growing because students are hungry. We are growing because we are providing an entry point into the movement that so many students are looking for.

JOSH RUSSELL
SDS organizer

Chicago

■ Christopher Phelps has written a timely but ultimately disappointing article about the vibrant and growing student movement. He transforms the tough challenges of movement-building into a set of tepid formulas about what not to do. The new wave of student activism in America and around the world is a hopeful development worthy of our active participation and respect. Yet Phelps focuses on the sectarian divides of the Movement for a Democratic Society (MDS) generation, rehearsing old political grudges or offering simplistic "lessons" from the New Left rather than highlighting the steps forward and the common ground among radical organizers. Our points of convergence (young and old, organizers and activists) are numerous, including the need to strive for participatory democracy and nonexclusion, to resist the savage wars and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, fight brutal poverty and gluttonous wealth here and globally, act to end catastrophic climate change, racial injustice and patriarchal power and reject the permanent "war on terror" in toto. Phelps would have benefited from more attention to what led to coordinated antiwar actions on sixty campuses in March, and to the new, diverse SDS campaigns, ranging from getting military recruiters out of high schools and off campuses to antisweatshop coordination, from opposition to police violence against the community to protest when war criminals speak, from support for Assata Shakur and the new Panther 8 defendants to fights for universal healthcare—radical youth organizing is broad and deep. This is the power and the inspiration of a vast left umbrella network with variety and vigor.

Phelps stereotypically characterizes me as a "celebrity," while the male ideologues are described by what they say about politics. I object. Who knows why any speech or article is well received? At the SDS conference at Brown University in spring 2006, it seemed that the political substance of my talk was what generated the positive response from students: the urgent needs to reject the framework of US military and economic empire, to forge active opposition to white supremacy and grapple with the issue of multiracial organization and to reckon with the importance of direct action to organizing and educating. I intentionally ignored the challenge to debate the issue of what killed SDS thirty-eight years ago and who was right when in favor of exploring what we all can do, in solidarity, now. Building bridges between issues, finding points of convergence and creating an independent radical movement resonates across generations. The last thing the new SDS needs is patronizing elders wagging their fingers with cautionary tales.

BERNARDINE DOHRN

Seattle

■ I thought Christopher Phelps was a little easy on Bernardine Dohrn and the Weathermen. Dohrn was the principal public leader of what we've always referred to as the ultraleft, or Weatherman, faction of SDS. She should not be held solely responsible for all the damage those goofballs did, but she was the leader, and until she repudiates her terribly damaging positions, she doesn't deserve to be looked to as an example for young people today.

I had a lot of experience with the ultralefts who looked to Dohrn for leadership. At the 1969 national SDS meeting, in Austin, Texas, which she chaired, she and her thuggish faction fought tooth and nail to prevent workshops, for fear that students who wanted to ally with working people and other average Americans might get a chance to speak up.

I was in the Army when Dohrn and her pals split SDS, in Chicago. I've always felt that they believed that if their crazy politics couldn't prevail in the group, then they wanted to destroy it, which is exactly what they did. If Dohrn wants to help build an "independent radical movement," she should begin by thoroughly repudiating the politics that she is so completely identified with.

BRIAN KING

Staten Island, NY

■ Christopher Phelps characterized me to fit his bias rather than represent my actual views. As a veteran organizer who has been arrested six times since the war began—for nonviolent civil disobedience—I regret the misrepresentation of myself and MDS. We do not share Phelps's preoccupation with the Weather Underground. There is a war on, and our responsibility is to end it as quickly as possible, in a manner consonant with our nonviolent beliefs. MDS does community organizing and legal defense work with student activists and partners with SDS in the Radical Education Project.

There are varying views of Weather in SDS, but they are not part of MDS discussions on how to build a multigenerational movement. My friendship with former members of SDS and Weather Underground has revealed something to me I wish Phelps could grasp: Those of us who grew up in the 1960s and '70s have moved on with our lives and learned from the past. We are not interested in reliving it—or debating what-ifs. Phelps could just as easily have fabricated his fictitious Weather issue in the new SDS without dropping my name.

THOMAS GOOD

Clinton, NY

■ My principal objection to the new SDS is that the young people who are attracted to it are selling themselves short. As I said in the March 2 *Chronicle of Higher Education Review*, "The whole idea of seeking to revive SDS…is well, very un-SDS. It…had come on the stage proclaiming the need for the American left to rethink its inherited orthodoxies." The new SDS is controlled by a cohort of radical elders enamored of the worst moment in the original SDS's history, its infatuation with revolutionary violence in the era of Bernardine Dohrn, Bill Ayers and Mark Rudd. To his credit, Rudd repudiates his role in the destruction of the original SDS. Dohrn and Ayers do not, and it is their "inherited orthodoxy," alas, that shapes the perspective of the reigning new SDS elders.

MAURICE ISSERMAN

Philadelphia

■ As Christopher Phelps notes, the new SDS faces big challenges and yet has managed to capture the attention and imagination of an inspiring cross-section of youth across the coun-

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EDITORIALS

Dems Sell Out on Trade

When Democratic and Republican leaders announce they have fashioned a "historic" bipartisan compromise on trade, put your hand over your wallet. It probably means somebody has been sold out. In this case, we think it's the broad coalition of citizens—labor and environmental advocates and others—who want to reform corporate-led globalization. That includes all those voters who, last fall, elected new Democrats who promised to confront the multinational establishment. These insurgent forces have been pushed into a corner by the Democratic leadership's "free trade" gambit. We urge them to push back—hard—and defeat the agreement if they can.

Despite what you may have read, Nancy Pelosi's compact with George W. Bush is not a done deal. It is an intense fight—the first round in what we expect to be an epic intramural struggle for the heart and soul of the Democratic Party. The deal that Speaker Pelosi and House Ways and Means Committee chair Charles Rangel made with the Administration casts the Democratic leadership's lot with Robert Rubin and the multinational interests of business and finance.

This deeper meaning of the deal has been obscured by Pelosi and her lieutenants' hailing their "compromise" as a great victory for labor and environmental advocates. It's true that the bargain includes strong new language calling for enforceable labor and environmental rights, and activists are rightly celebrating that advance.

But look more closely. It is an empty achievement. The breakthrough language would be applied only to agreements pending with Peru and Panama—trivial in size and economic impact. The claim that this labor/enviro provision will become the template for future trade agreements is bogus. This deal is for Bush only. The next President will make his or her own deal with Congress. The same claim was made for the labor rights provision in the Jordan trade agreement Bill Clinton signed in 2000. It didn't change anything. In fact, Jordan has easily evaded what were thought—even by labor activists—to be solid protections in that agreement. If Pelosi is fighting for a genuinely progressive agreement, she should insist that Bush commit himself to the same strong labor/enviro rules for the stalled Doha round of the World Trade Organization negotiations. That would be a real victory.

The objective of Democratic leaders seems clear: to marginalize the fair-trade dissenters, coax the party into approving more trade agreements and, above all, grant renewed fast-track authority to the President. Fast-track effectively stymies Congress's influence on trade issues, denying any chance to make changes in negotiated agreements. That's why the business lobby loves it so. That the US Chamber of Commerce is delighted with Pelosi ought to tell you something.

All progressive Democrats should ask the leaders why they feel the need to rush into any new trade agreements. Their strategy gives away the majority party's new bargaining leverage. With growing ranks of trade critics among House and Senate Democrats, the party can demand much more from Wall Street and corporate interests. No new trade deals, for instance, until business endorses universal healthcare or accepts new controls on outsourcing and offshore financial schemes. Or dozens of other progressive reforms.

If House insurgents oppose Pelosi & Co., they may not have the votes to win, but they can force the Speaker into a very uncomfortable bind. She will have to win on Republican votes. That's the same game Bill Clinton played in the 1990s, enacting NAFTA and other job-killing trade agreements over opposition from the rank

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and file. Working people got the message—and many of them stopped voting Democratic. If the deal prevails, we predict the party will pay the same price again. Disenchanted voters will conclude, correctly, that nothing has changed in Washington. Insurgents will be doing the Speaker a great favor if they force her to abandon this grand compromise.

The deeper problem facing the Democratic Party is that it does not have a coherent strategy on trade and globalization, aside from going along with the status quo. The goal of establishing international labor and environmental rights is heroic, but it can't succeed as long as the trading system itself is flawed. Furthermore, in the best of circumstances it will take a generation for the labor rights struggle to make a dent in global wage differentials. Can working people wait twenty years? Can the American economy?

An economic strategy that promises basic change requires action in Washington, not negotiations in foreign capitals. It might be built around the following points: First, cap the swollen US trade deficits—stop the bleeding—and develop a more balanced international trade regime. Second, use the tax code to get control of US multinationals and force them to align with the nation's economic interests. Third, force the reform of one-sided international institutions like the WTO and IMF so they will serve people and societies, not just capital and corporations. Fourth, continue the long-term struggle to enact trade rules for people of all nations—protecting labor, the environment, economic equity and other progressive values.

All these matters are deeply complicated and controversial. If Democrats would at least start working on them instead of playing clever games with Washington insiders, they might convince Americans that they are serious reformers committed to serious change.

The Secret's *Success*

If you've been reading the papers, watching television or surfing the Internet over the past four months, you'll know *The Secret*: Rhonda Byrne's bestselling New Age DVD and book promoting "The Law of Attraction"—that as a man (or woman) thinketh, so shall he or she be. Nothing much is new in that idea, which has a several-thousand-year history running from Hinduism right into Christian parables featuring lilies.

What's new is the magnitude and velocity of *The Secret*'s success. With 3.8 million copies of the $23.95 hardcover in print in the United States alone, and an estimated 1.5 million copies of the $34.95 DVD sold, Byrne's rate of sales is nearly unrivaled in the annals of self-help snake oil. And these figures don't include the $4.95 digital downloads of the film from the *Secret* website. Even among self-help classics such as M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled* (10 million copies sold over three decades) and Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life* (22 million sold over five years), Byrne's enterprise promises to break records for sales rates if not totals. The book is on bestseller lists in the United States, Australia (Byrne's home), England and Ireland, and some thirty translations are slated.

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There's no problem, large or small, for which this bestseller doesn't claim to have an answer. Mired in debt? No problem, just start visualizing checks and paste a phony $1 million bill on the ceiling above your bed (so you'll see it first thing in the morning). Suffering from cancer? Skip the chemo and focus on healing thoughts. Need a parking place? Picture yourself pulling into that perfect unmetered spot. And while you're at it, get yourself a late-model car. The universe, *The Secret* asserts, is akin to a mail-order business and "your job is to declare what you would like to have from the catalog."

Many commentators have attributed Byrne's success to viral marketing savvy: She took the novel approach of launching her message as a film that went direct to DVD and online download before going into print. Clever art direction added to the film's appeal: Parchment backdrops and a red wax seal evoke *The Da Vinci Code*'s secrecy. Certainly Byrne's know-how as a former television producer has served her well. With video clips at the ready and a cast of more than a dozen self-help gurus available for interview, *The Secret* has been a talk show producer's dream. Television coverage, from *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to *Larry King Live* to *Nightline* and *20/20,* continues apace.

Winfrey in particular has championed *The Secret*, claiming that her own success is living proof of the Law of Attraction (with an uncharacteristic obliviousness to the trailblazers of the feminist and civil rights movements who preceded her). In the wake of Oprah's endorsement, sales skyrocketed. According to the *Washington Post*, Nielsen Book Scan reported that weekly sales of *The Secret* jumped from 18,000 to 101,000 copies in the week after the first *Oprah* show endorsing the book and to a staggering 190,000 copies the week after the second program aired.

Much of *The Secret*'s success can be chalked up to the mass media's infatuation with Byrne & Co.'s self-congratulatory message: that those who are well-off deserve their success—after all, they attracted it. But what about the unfortunate corollary that would necessarily apply to those who are ill, impoverished, dispossessed or worse? What about *The Secret*'s more egregious claims—that diseased thinking causes one to attract cancer and that positive thinking can cure it; that the children of Darfur attracted the starvation their families are facing with their wrong thinking (yes, you heard that correctly from *Secret* contributor Bob Proctor on *Nightline*); and that Jessica Lunsford, the 9-year-old Florida girl who was buried alive by sexual predator John Couey, brought her gruesome fate on herself (according to compassionate *Secret* "metaphysician" Joe Vitale on *Larry King Live*). *The Secret*'s contributors even claim that the antiwar movement causes war and, my personal favorite, that looking at fat people will make you fat.

To her credit, Winfrey has stepped back from her wholehearted endorsement, posting a notice on her website recommending that people with cancer not forgo treatment. The Law of Attraction is only one law, notes the revision. But with all the obvious nonsense in *The Secret*'s message, why are people buying it? Are Americans (and the people of several dozen other countries) living testimony to that P.T. Barnum adage about the birthrate for suckers? Probably not. Simple desperation renders people susceptible to all manner of false promises.

For clues about the source of *Secret* aficionados' despair one need look no further than the film, where within minutes of the hocus-pocus opening sequence, Proctor asks, "Why is it that 1 percent of the people earn 96 percent of the world's money? The answer is simple—they know the secret." Vignette after vignette features a mailbox filling and refilling with bills and late-payment notices. Viewers are advised to imagine checks arriving instead!

The real secret is that Americans earn less per week (in dollars adjusted for inflation) than they did in 1972, when real wages peaked for the average worker. The pain of lost earning power, a shredded social safety net and ever-expanding wealth inequality has been eased somewhat by easy credit, as has been masterfully demonstrated in two recent releases—James D. Scurlock's *Maxed Out* and Danny Schechter's *In Debt We Trust*. But Americans are feeling the pinch, and the magical thinking that one can simply "ask-believe-receive" has a powerful appeal. While subscribing to *The Secret*'s fantasy of effortless wealth and omnipotence requires that one buy into its darker victim-blaming corollaries, that seems to be a price millions are willing to pay rather than concede that their lives are subject to forces beyond their control. Dire circumstances call for magical solutions.

During the last Gilded Age, another bestseller seized the national imagination. Ralph Waldo Trine's 1897 *In Tune With the Infinite* promised that as long as one was in the cosmic flow, one could expect wealth and well-being. Henry Ford was a Trine fan, and credited the inspirational writer with sustaining him during his arduous efforts to extract more labor power from his workforce. New Age thinking, like the New Thought that preceded it, provides a ready justification for the vast inequalities in the distribution of resources. But more than that, it offers the hope that you, too, may be provided for—just as long as you stay positive and hold on to your dreams.

That's where progressives can take a tip from the success of self-help fads and focus on offering Americans some measure of hope, as Stephen Duncombe argues so eloquently in his recent

ON THE WEB

§ Outsourcing War: Jeremy Scahill testifies before a House subcommittee about the impact of private military contractors on the Iraq War. Read the transcript, watch the video.

§ Politics as Usual? Not! John Nichols on how Chuck Hagel and Michael Bloomberg may upset the Campaign '08 applecart as independent candidates.

§ *Sicko*: Katrina vanden Heuvel on Michael Moore's latest exposé.

§ Show Us Your Clavicles: Lakshmi Chaudhry on the latest obsession of anorexic fashionistas.

§ Ethically Compromised: David Corn looks at Paul Wolfowitz's ethical debacle at the World Bank.

§ *Spider-Man 3*: Stuart Klawans on the superhero's heavy moral baggage.

§ *Nation* Poll: What's George W. Bush's dumbest utterance?

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COMMENT

book *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*. Instead of "ask-believe-receive," Duncombe's message can be summed up as "dream-connect-mobilize." Duncombe reminds us that we have to win hearts, not just minds, and that the secret to the success of a newly revived progressive movement will be tapping into people's aspirations and imaginations. There's a secret worth uncovering. MICKI MCGEE

Micki McGee, the author of Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life *(Oxford), tracks self-help trends at www.selfhelpinc.com.*

New Energy for America

This is the first of a series looking at the "Ideas Primary" in Campaign '08.

Confronted with the Iraq War, Hurricane Katrina, rising gas prices and the "inconvenient truth" of global warming, Americans are looking for leadership on energy independence and the threat posed by catastrophic climate change. Even George Bush, Big Oil's pocketed President, now pays lip service to the need to end our "addiction to oil." But with his policies making us more, not less, dependent on foreign oil, energy will be at the center of the 2008 campaign. The question is whether the presidential candidates have caught up with the voters.

Energy independence now rivals healthcare as the top domestic concern. In an April Center for American Progress poll, 60 percent of Americans supported bold action on global warming. A staggering 79 percent believe shifting to alternative energy sources will help the economy and create, not cost, jobs. Voters think the United States is falling behind other countries, and they want government to lead.

This consensus has yet to penetrate Republican presidential campaigns. While the GOP candidates nod rhetorically to the importance of energy independence, they offer little policy vision and few proposals. Frontrunner Rudy Giuliani doesn't mention energy, climate change or the environment in the issue section of his website—a bizarre omission for someone pitching a campaign on his ability to wage a smart "war on terror." Mitt Romney echoes Dick Cheney, pitting the economy against clean energy, warning that "Republicans should never abandon pro-growth conservative principles in an effort to embrace the ideas of Al Gore."

Only Senator John McCain stands apart from the lemmings, calling for action on climate change and co-sponsoring a cap on carbon emissions. McCain couples this with strong support of nuclear power, dismissing continuing concerns about cost, waste storage, safety and proliferation.

In stark contrast, all the Democratic candidates offer bolder initiatives. Hillary Clinton, John Edwards, Bill Richardson and Dennis Kucinich have embraced the need for an Apollo-like program—a multilayered drive for energy independence. And Barack Obama eloquently depicts a generational challenge: "At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the country that faced down the tyranny of fascism and communism is now called to challenge the tyranny of oil."

Each major Democratic candidate offers a signature proposal. League of Conservation Voters head Gene Karpinski praises Edwards for having the "most comprehensive" plan. Edwards argues generally that dealing with global warming is more important than closing budget deficits or sustaining the Bush tax cuts. He would generate $13 billion a year from a carbon dioxide cap and a rollback of oil subsidies and use that to finance renewable energy technologies. He calls for reducing oil consumption by increasing the percentage of biofuels in the fuel supply and by giving subsidies to auto manufacturers to produce more efficient vehicles. He would mandate that 25 percent of our electricity come from renewable resources by 2025 and require that all new demand through the next decade be met through improved energy efficiency. He'd give consumers tax breaks for purchasing efficient cars and appliances and increase spending on clean-energy research and development. Edwards says this will help generate jobs and growth, estimating that 1 million jobs would be created.

Senator Chris Dodd is nearly as comprehensive, and more courageous. He scorns as ineffective the "cap and trade" program the other candidates support and bites the bullet for a carbon tax he estimates could generate $50 billion a year to be spent deploying clean energy and energy-efficient technologies. Dodd also calls for a job-training program to help workers gain experience and upward mobility in emerging clean-energy markets.

Senator Clinton makes jobs central to her argument. She alone of the leading candidates attended the January Apollo Alliance summit, where she argued that "the clean energy agenda is a jobs agenda." Her signature initiative is a Strategic Energy Fund of $50 billion over ten years, to be raised by taxing the "excess profits" and rolling back the subsidies of Big Oil. The fund would subsidize existing technologies and seed research and development. Of the candidates, Clinton is the most forceful in taking on the oil companies and challenging Bush Administration failures.

Senator Obama's eloquence is unmatched—even by his policies. He has aggressively pushed for coupling renewable fuels and vehicle efficiency. His distinctive initiative links mandates for higher mileage standards to billions in incentives to auto companies to retool assembly lines to produce high-mileage vehicles. He would do this by having the government take over a portion of the companies' staggering retiree healthcare costs in return for spending half the savings on retooling. This cleverly marries healthcare and energy, two compelling national concerns, but it's limited to a handful of companies in one industry. Obama has run into trouble with environmentalists by championing the use of lique-

CALVIN TRILLIN

EXIT TONY BLAIR

He did some good, but, still, this clever dude'll
Go down in history as Bush's poodle.

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fied coal as an alternative to gasoline, which would aid energy independence but add to global warming and pollution.

Governor Bill Richardson, a former Energy Secretary, joins the call for a "massive…Apollo Program." He argues that while everybody talks about these things, he's actually done them. Under his administration New Mexico has become a leader in clean energy. Richardson has established an energy standard mandating that renewables produce 20 percent of the state's energy by 2020, has provided tax credits for investment in energy-efficient buildings and created the nation's first Renewable Energy Transmission Authority, which facilitates the deployment of existing alternatives.

While his plans aren't as detailed, Representative Dennis Kucinich, a leading opponent of nuclear power for decades, offers the broadest vision, calling for a "Global Green Deal." He urges that we not only invest at home but help supply developing nations with "cheap, dependable, renewable energy technologies like wind and solar."

In sum, Democrats call for a dramatic change of course from Bush's policies, and their rhetoric touts a compelling national mission. Their policies, however, are more cautious. Except for Edwards, Democrats still hew to fiscal discipline. They scrimp on spending and emphasize caps, regulations and taxes, thus giving traction to Republican gibes that Democratic policies will hurt the economy.

Worse, Democrats seem to belie their own rhetoric by treating the issue as simply one part of a broader policy agenda. No one has yet portrayed the scope and urgency of this national imperative. A bold leader would summon the nation to action. She or he would call for a crash drive for energy independence, spurring individual, business and government action. Public investment in research and development would galvanize the scientific community; investment in rebuilding our cities would create jobs and pay for itself in lower energy costs; aggressive support for renewables would secure our energy supply, lower trade deficits and free us from future resource wars. A green job corps could train workers and harness the idealism of the young. Contrast this vital investment in our future—and the economic growth it would stimulate—with the nearly $500 billion (headed toward $2 trillion) the Bush Administration has squandered on the Iraq War.

Around the globe, people are learning that we have no choice but to move rapidly to a new energy future. Corporations are getting the message. Al Gore is electrifying activists and the young. Americans will respond to a leader who inspires us to meet that challenge, unleashes our energies and imaginations, acknowledges the costs and wrenching changes required while demonstrating the benefits—new jobs and technologies, cheaper and more dependable power, cleaner air, lower trade deficits. The transition to clean energy is both an immense challenge and an immense opportunity. Under Bush, the right has failed the test, and so far the Republican candidates have punted. The public is looking for leadership. That job is still open.

ROBERT L. BOROSAGE AND KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Robert L. Borosage is co-director of the Campaign for America's Future and a co-founder of the Apollo Alliance.

The Third World Idea

The era of decolonization is sixty years old. It began in 1947, when India and Pakistan won their independence from Britain, and it continued until 1974, when the Portuguese Empire collapsed. In between, African and Asian nations emerged from the long night of colonial rule, and in Latin America new regimes broke out of the grip of oligarchies.

This year Ghana celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its independence, the first sub-Saharan African nation to free itself of its colonizers. Kwame Nkrumah, a few minutes after his country's birth, offered this vision for its future: "We are going to see that we create our own African personality and identity. We again rededicate ourselves in the struggle to emancipate other countries in Africa. Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked to the total liberation of the African continent." Ghana's independence was significant, but alone it was vulnerable. Nkrumah surveyed the African continent and the rest of the "darker nations," whose solidarity would be essential.

These new nations did not want only to rid themselves of their colonial masters. Crucially, they also articulated a vision for a new global dispensation. Twenty-nine new nations and movements had gathered together at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 to lay out how they wished to reshape the world. "Irresistible forces have swept the two continents," said Indonesia's Sukarno. "There are new conditions, new concepts, new problems, new ideals abroad in the world."

The central concept for the new nations was the Third World. For them, the Third World was not a place; it was a project. Galvanized by mass movements and by the failures of capitalist maldevelopment, leaders in the darker nations looked to one another for an alternative agenda. Politically they wanted more planetary democracy. No more the serfs of their colonial masters, they wanted to have a voice and power on the world stage. What would that voice say? It would speak of three core principles: peace (nuclear disarmament), bread (what they dubbed a New International Economic Order, in which human needs would take precedence over profit) and justice (social development and an end to racism). They would carry these aspirations to the United Nations, where, forming a Non-Aligned Movement, they engaged in a concerted struggle to gain ascendancy. Nigeria's Foreign Minister Jaja Wachuku chided his fellows for their acceptance of the inequality built into the new international body. "Are we only going to continue to be veranda boys," he asked, watching from the balcony as the five permanent members controlled the debate?

Today the Third World project is no longer. It was not a failure, for that implies it was doomed from the start. No, it was assassinated. The main culprit was not corruption, one-party rule or famine; it was what we have come to call globalization. From its inception, the Third World project faced an enemy in the advanced capitalist states (led, with confidence, by the United States), determined to subdue any independent dynamic in the darker nations. For three decades, the Third World was able to fend off that challenge, partly due to backing from the Soviet

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COMMENT

Union and China, but mainly because of the widespread support the project enjoyed among the masses of people who lived in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

From the late 1960s, capital from the advanced industrial states flooded the world, just as raw material prices plummeted. We know what came next: States in short-term debt because of a drop in commodity prices and a rise in military expenditures borrowed heavily. To recover, they turned to the International Monetary Fund. The IMF's charter enjoins it to offer short-term credit without question; instead, the fund used this opportunity to demand "structural adjustments." The IMF desiccated the capacity of states to act on behalf of their own populations, and threw people to the wolves of destitution and hopelessness.

In 1979, for example, Ghana went to the IMF for a series of loans guaranteed by a promise to unravel whatever gains had been made by the new state. Unable to repay them, Ghana became a ward of the fund. By 1987 the "fundamentals" of Ghana's economy were stable, at a substantial cost: A decline in the price of cocoa and the dumping of chickens and other foreign agricultural goods had crippled the population's ability to survive. In 2001 Ghana's president, John Kufuor, painted a stark portrait of the situation: "After twenty long years of implementing structural adjustment programs, our economy has remained weak and vulnerable and not sufficiently transformed to sustain accelerated growth and development. Poverty has become rather widespread, unemployment very high, manufacturing and agriculture in decline and our external and domestic debts much too heavy a burden to bear." In a tragic coda to this story, the Fiftieth Anniversary Jubilee kente cloth, with Nkrumah's image emblazoned on it, was printed in China. "We must be able to print our anniversary clothes," said Abraham Coomson, general secretary of Ghana's Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Union. "Otherwise what are we celebrating?"

The assassination of the Third World agenda has also shrunk the political horizons of the darker nations. Nkrumah once exuberantly declared, "Ghana, your beloved country, is free forever." Now Ghana aspires merely to enter the ranks of "middle income countries" by 2015.

Ghanaians and others in what is today called the global South continue to push against the power that smothers their lives. Trade unions, citizens groups, political parties and other such forces now make matters difficult for unfettered capital. Political developments in Latin America raise hopes elsewhere. When Hugo Chávez attended the African Union summit this past July, one African leader hailed his presence as "a morale booster as well as an assurance that Africa can also make it." At the September meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana, Chávez evoked the history of the Third World and called for the construction of a project befitting our times. The Third World awaits such a resurrection, not as nostalgia but as a project that matches our contemporary dilemmas.

VIJAY PRASHAD

Vijay Prashad, the George and Martha Kellner Chair of South Asian History at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, is the author of The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, just out from the New Press.*

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ERIC ALTERMAN

‘Can We Talk?’ (cont’d.)

The difficulty of solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict stems from more sources than one can comfortably count, but surely one of the most significant is our inability even to discuss it. The emotional intensity of so many people’s investment in their own self-justifying story line censors the effects of any potentially upsetting fact.

For instance, I thought it a pretty significant problem for Israel’s unquestioning defenders when Peace Now revealed that nearly a third of the land currently occupied by Israeli settlements was actually listed as private Palestinian land. In other words, these so-called “facts on the ground” rest on exactly the pattern of illegal seizure that critics have long alleged and successions of Israeli governments have sought to cover up. But I’ve yet to read a word from those dedicated to defending any and every action by Israel explaining how this new information affects their arguments.

Similarly, the apparently never-ending deadly violence between Hamas fighters and the al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades in Gaza—to say nothing of the murderous hatred both sides openly profess toward all Jews—ought to provide considerable cause for pause among those who demand an immediate end to the Israeli occupation, security concerns be damned. And yet from those who hold that position, one hears precious little about Israel’s entirely understandable worries about the prospects of being asked to live alongside a failed, fanatical and heavily armed Islamic state.

Personally, I deal with this problem by refusing to discuss the conflict with anyone, anywhere, assuming that the likely result of any face-to-face dispute is almost always personal fury rather than intellectual enlightenment. As it happens, though, I accidentally undertook a controlled experiment on the topic. On May 2, I attended a fascinating discussion at the New York–based Center for Jewish History in celebration of the recent publication by Schocken Books of Hannah Arendt’s *The Jewish Writings*. At one point the book’s co-editor, Jerome Kohn, made what struck me as a shocking contention that the only people who found fault with Arendt’s political judgment are those whose personal or material interests she opposed. My admiration for Arendt’s life and work is nearly boundless, but I can’t help thinking she made some serious mistakes of political judgment.

Through the combined magic of BlackBerry, Google and Wikipedia, I was able to come up with exactly the text I needed to make my case. In the May 1948 issue of *Commentary* (!), Arendt stuck to her rhetorical guns on behalf of a binational alternative to the Zionist proposal for an independent Israel. “The independence of Palestine can be achieved only on a solid basis of Jewish-Arab cooperation,” she argued. “The real goal of the Jews in Palestine is the building up of a Jewish homeland. This goal must never be sacrificed to the pseudo-sovereignty of a Jewish state.” Whatever one thinks of the morality of this contention, it cannot sensibly be said to rest on any notion of pragmatic political relevance. When these words were published, the 1948 war was already under way. The idea that Arab inhabitants of Palestine and the surrounding nations were going to invite the Jews to “build up” their homeland cooperatively without the protection of a Jewish state—and that state’s army—was about as likely as the Jews there deciding to convert en masse to Islam. That Arendt was still pining for this hopelessly utopian vision this late in the process demonstrated, I argued, her lack of political judgment.

Neither Kohn nor his fellow panelist, the New School University’s Richard Bernstein, sought to address my point. Instead, both preferred to speak of Israeli mistreatment of the Palestinians and the disjunction between the kind of state the Zionists hoped to build and the one that exists today. The question of Arendt’s judgment was ignored. What was important was how one felt about Israel.

Three days later, I took my customary Saturday morning constitutional across Central Park to Temple Israel on Seventy-fifth Street and Park Avenue, where I’ve lately been going to Torah study class with my learned and eloquent friend, the recently installed Rabbi David Gelfand. This week, however, we were treated to a lecture on the year 1948 by Stephen Berk, professor of Holocaust and Jewish studies at Union College. Berk offered up a reasonably balanced lecture that, for instance, did not skirt the issue of Israeli expulsion of the Palestinians and massacres committed by the right-wing Revisionist Stern Gang (though he was a bit freer with the word “terrorist” when it applied to Arab massacres of Jews than vice versa).

This being a Reform shul, I felt no compunction in retrieving the BlackBerry and reading the same text from Arendt’s 1948 *Commentary* essay. I posed the same question to Professor Berk that I had asked three days earlier. Berk took the opportunity to lecture the audience about the evils of Hamas. While I agreed with him about Hamas, I failed to see its relevance to my strictly historical inquiry about Hannah Arendt and 1948. Berk replied to my question about this by saying he was certain that the audience’s “next question” would be about Hamas, the PLO and the like. (A congregation member also piped up that this had been “clearly implied” by my question.) Given my assumption of goodwill coupled with the scholarly bona fides of the speakers at both places—to say nothing of the fact that we are all Jews—I left the temple confirmed in my belief that mere discussion of the topic remains impossible.

As it happens two professors, Sami Adwan of Bethlehem University and Dan Bar-On of Ben-Gurion University, are trying to address exactly this problem under the aegis of the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (www.vispo.com/PRIME/leohn.htm). Called “Learning Each Other’s Historical Narrative,” their project aims to develop parallel histories of the Israelis and Palestinians, translate them into Hebrew and Arabic and train teams of teachers and historians to teach in the classroom. If we are ever to have any real hope of solving the Israel/Palestine crisis, then surely this is the place to begin. ■

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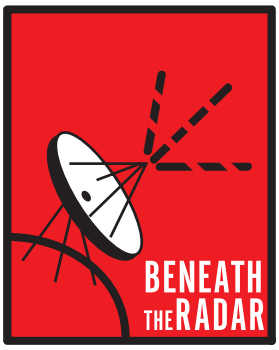
GARY YOUNGE

Labour Crowns King Brown



Nine months ago a leaked Downing Street memo mapped out Tony Blair's exit strategy. "As TB enters his final phase he needs to be focusing way beyond the finishing line, not looking at it," wrote New Labour *consigliere* Philip Gould. "He needs to go with the crowds wanting more. He should be the star who won't even play that last encore. In moving towards the end he must focus on the future."

When Blair finally set a date for his departure the crowds, it seemed, wanted less, not more. His announcement came after local elections left Labour with its lowest number of local councilors in thirty years and its worst result in Scotland in half a century. Interest rates are going up; Iraq is heading for anarchy. Not only is the audience not calling for an encore. If this were amateur night at Harlem's Apollo, the Executioner would have dragged him off long ago.

The manner of Blair's departure is illuminating. He said he would quit more than a year ago, leaving pundits to quibble only about the timing. That makes him the first British leader in living memory to step down without having been ousted by his own party or the voters. In truth, he started jumping even as he was being pushed. Ever since he moved into 10 Downing Street, his next-door neighbor Chancellor Gordon Brown has been trying to evict him and take his place. Once Blair followed Bush into Iraq, the public increasingly wanted him out too. For the last few years Blair has not so much been exercising power as hanging on to it.

These two pressures—Iraq's crisis and Brown's careerism—could produce a turning point in the war. It is singularly the most unpopular thing Blair has done and the policy with which he is most closely and personally identified. The one pledge that Brown could deliver that would make the transition worthy of the name is to withdraw from Iraq immediately. Britain's departure would remove one of the few fig leaves remaining for Bush and give further momentum to the political inevitability of withdrawal. A new leader is coming, and a new foreign policy is needed. Brown arrives, the troops leave. It has not just logic but symmetry.

Such a move would certainly be popular in Britain. A recent BBC poll showed 60 percent of Britons are now opposed to the invasion. More than half said that "given their experiences of the war in Iraq," they would not trust a British government that said it needed to take military action because a country posed a direct threat to national security. Yet with both main parties supporting the occupation, this view has yet to find effective political expression. Brown could change all that and in one stroke shift his image from dour Scot to populist hero.

Sadly this is unlikely to happen. The rivalry between Blair and Brown is not political but personal—the product of mid-life crisis and thwarted professional ambition. It has as much to do with politics as Biggie and Tupac's rap wars had to do with music. In the words of Ice T: "It's a personal beef that got out of whack."

As the co-architect of New Labour, Brown is implicated in every important aspect of the Blair agenda. It is an agenda defined as much by what it opposed—the left—as what it effectively was—a government of the European center-right. True, it had progressive elements. New Labour vastly increased investment in health and education, ushered in the minimum wage, civil unions for same-sex couples, devolution for Scotland and Wales and reduced child poverty. But all this came with caveats and within a context designed to limit the impact of their agenda if not undermine it altogether. Health and education were partly privatized, university tuition fees were introduced, the minimum wage was set too low, economic inequalities increased.

Philosophically, the Iraq War was always aberrant with the stated aims of the Blair project. New Labour presented itself as a modernizing force. But just as Britons were recovering from their sense of colonial entitlement to rule the world with benevolence and bombs, he pursued a foreign policy mired in imperial hubris. Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Afghanistan—these foreign military adventures made Thatcher look like a peacenik and Queen Victoria seem like a stay-at-home monarch.

Politically, however, Iraq was consistent with Blair's strategic thinking. It exemplified his tendencies to alienate natural allies, rely on spin, attack the liberal media and establish distance from the Labour Party, in whose name he governed. It confirmed his arrogance and isolation. It has been emblematic of the way he has dealt with pensioners, students, asylum seekers and Muslims.

The country clearly wants a change of direction; in all likelihood it is about to get a change of director. The main beneficiaries of the inevitable cynicism arising from this are the Conservatives, who enjoyed their highest share of the vote since 1992—the last time they won at the polls—in the local elections. Brown is even less popular than Blair and, according to polls, would lose in an election against the new Tory leader, David Cameron.

One would think that the instinct for self-preservation alone would encourage the Labour Party either to impose its will on a Brown premiership or force a challenge in the primary. A left candidate, John McDonnell, did come forward but conceded defeat after he failed to get the backing of a sufficient number of MPs to enter the election. This is bad news for everybody. Brown needs a challenger; Labour is in desperate need of a debate about its future and purpose. The fact that it won't get one is yet more evidence of the Blair legacy.

Having dismantled the internal levers of democracy within the party, Labour has been transformed into little more than an electoral machine. Brown is poised not for an election but a coronation. The crowds turned up for a morality play; they are witnessing a tragedy. ■

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ARTICLES

Hillary Inc.

In a packed ballroom in midtown Manhattan, Hillary Clinton is addressing hundreds of civil rights activists and labor leaders convened by the Rev. Al Sharpton for his annual National Action Network conference. The junior senator from New York starts slowly but picks up steam when she hits on the economic anxiety many in the room feel. "We're not making progress," she says, her sharp Midwestern monotone accented with a bit of Southern twang. "Wages are flat." Nods of agreement. "This economy is not working!" Applause. She's not quite the rhetorical populist her husband was on the campaign trail, but she can still feel your pain. "Everything has been skewed," Clinton says, jabbing her index finger for emphasis, "to help the privileged and the powerful at the expense of everybody else!"

ARI BERMAN

It's a rousing speech, though ultimately not very convincing. If Clinton really wanted to curtail the influence of the powerful, she might start with the advisers to her own campaign, who represent some of the weightiest interests in corporate America. Her chief strategist, Mark Penn, not only polls for America's biggest companies but also runs one of the world's premier PR agencies. A bevy of current and former Hillary advisers, including her communications guru, Howard Wolfson, are linked to a prominent lobbying and PR firm—the Glover Park Group—that has cozied up to the pharmaceutical industry and Rupert Murdoch. Her fundraiser in chief, Terry McAuliffe, has the priciest Rolodex in Washington, luring high-rolling contributors to Clinton's campaign. Her husband, since leaving the presidency, has made millions giving speeches and counsel to investment banks like Goldman Sachs and Citigroup. They house, in addition to other Wall Street firms, the Clintons' closest economic advisers, such as Bob Rubin and Roger Altman, whose DC brain trust, the Hamilton Project, is Clinton's economic team in waiting. Even the liberal in her camp, former deputy chief of staff Harold Ickes, has lobbied for the telecom and healthcare industries, including a for-profit nursing home association indicted in Texas for improperly funneling money to disgraced former House majority leader Tom DeLay. "She's got a deeper bench of big money and corporate supporters than her competitors," says Eli Attie, a former speechwriter to Vice President Al Gore. Not only is Hillary more reliant on large donations and corporate money than her Democratic rivals, but advisers in her inner circle are closely affiliated with unionbusters, GOP operatives, conservative media and other Democratic Party antagonists.

It's not exactly an advertisement for the working-class hero, or a picture her campaign freely displays. Her lengthy support for the Iraq War is Clinton's biggest liability in Democratic primary circles. But her ties to corporate America say as much, if not more, about what she values and cast doubt on her ability and willingness to fight for the progressive policies she claims to champion. She is "running to help and restore the great middle class in our country," Wolfson says. So was Bill in 1992. He was for "putting people first." Then he entered the White House and pushed for NAFTA, signed welfare reform, consolidated the airwaves through the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (leading to Clear Channel's takeover) and cleared the mergers of mega-banks. Would the First Lady do any different? Ever since the defeat of healthcare reform, Hillary has been a committed incrementalist, describing herself as a creature of the "moderate, sensible center" whom business admires and rewards. During her six years in the Senate, she's rarely been out front on difficult economic issues. Given her proximity to money and power, it's not hard to figure out why she keeps controversial figures close to her—even if their work becomes a liability for her campaign.

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Polling Czar

After the 1994 election, Democrats had just lost both houses of Congress, and President Clinton was floundering in the polls. At the urging of his wife, he turned to Dick Morris, a friend from their time in Arkansas. Morris brought in two pollsters from New York, Doug Schoen and his partner, Mark Penn, a portly, combative workaholic. Morris decided what to poll and Penn polled it. They immediately pushed Clinton to the right, enacting the now-infamous strategy of "triangulation," which co-opted Republican policies like welfare reform and tax cuts and emphasized small-bore issues that supposedly cut across the ideological divide. "They were the ones who said, 'Make the '96 election about nothing except V-chips and school uniforms,'" says a former adviser to Bill. When Morris got caught with a call girl, Penn became the most important adviser in Clinton's second term. "In a White House where polling is virtually a religion," the *Washington Post* reported in 1996, "Penn is the high priest."

Penn, who had previously worked in the business world for companies like Texaco and Eli Lilly, brought his corporate ideology to the White House. After moving to Washington he aggressively expanded his polling firm, Penn, Schoen & Berland (PSB). It was said that Penn was the only person who could get Bill Clinton and Bill Gates on the same line. Penn's largest client was Microsoft, and he saw no contradiction between working for both the plaintiff and the defense in what was at the time the country's largest antitrust case. A variety of controversial clients enlisted PSB. The firm defended Procter & Gamble's Olestra from charges that the food additive caused anal leakage, blamed Texaco's bankruptcy on greedy jurors and market-tested genetically modified foods for Monsanto. PSB introduced to consulting the concept of "inoculation": shielding corporations from scandal through clever advertising and marketing.

In 2000 Penn became the chief architect of Hillary's Senate victory in New York, persuading her, in a rerun of '96, to eschew big themes and relentlessly focus on poll-tested pothole politics, such as suburban transit lines and dairy farming upstate. Following that election, Penn became a very rich man—and an even more valued commodity in the business world (Hillary paid him $1 million for her re-election campaign in '06 and $277,000 in the first quarter of this year). The massive PR empire WPP Group acquired Penn's polling firm for an undisclosed sum in 2001 and four years later named him worldwide CEO of one of its most prized properties, the PR firm Burson-Marsteller (B-M). A key player in the decision to hire Penn was Howard Paster, President Clinton's chief lobbyist to Capitol Hill and an influential presence inside WPP. "Clients of stature come to Mark constantly for counsel," says Paster, who informally advises Hillary, explaining the hire. The press release announcing Penn's promotion noted his work "developing and implementing deregulation informational programs for the electric utilities industry and in the financial services sector." The release blithely ignored how utility deregulation contributed to the California electricity crisis manipulated by Enron and the blackout of 2003, which darkened much of the Northeast and upper Midwest.

Ari Berman, a Nation *contributing writer, is a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute.*

Burson-Marsteller is hardly a natural fit for a prominent Democrat. The firm has represented everyone from the Argentine military junta to Union Carbide after the 1984 Bhopal disaster in India, in which thousands were killed when toxic fumes were released by one of its plants, to Royal Dutch Shell, which has been accused of colluding with the Nigerian government in committing major human rights violations. B-M pioneered the use of pseudo-grassroots front groups, known as "astroturfing," to wage stealth corporate attacks against environmental and consumer groups. It set up the National Smokers Alliance on behalf of Philip Morris to fight tobacco regulation in the early 1990s. Its current clients include major players in the finance, pharmaceutical and energy industries. In 2006, with Penn at the helm, the company gave 57 percent of its campaign contributions to Republican candidates.

A host of prominent Republicans fall under Penn's purview. B-M's Washington lobbying arm, BKSH & Associates, is run by Charlie Black, a leading GOP operative who maintains close ties to the White House, including Karl Rove, and was a partner with Lee Atwater, the consultant who crafted the Willie Horton smear campaign for George H.W. Bush in 1988. In recent years Black's clients have included the likes of Iraq's Ahmad Chalabi, the darling of the neocon right in the run-up to the war; Lockheed Martin; and Occidental Petroleum. In 2005 he landed a contract with the Lincoln Group, the disgraced PR firm that covertly placed US military propaganda in Iraqi news outlets.

Black is only one cannon in B-M's Republican arsenal. Its "grassroots" lobbying branch, Direct Impact—which specializes in corporate-funded astroturfing—is run by Dennis Whitfield, a former Reagan Cabinet official, and Dave DenHerder, the political director of the Bush/Cheney '04 campaign in Ohio. That's not all. B-M recently partnered with lobbyist Ed Gillespie, the former head of the Republican National Committee, in creating the new ad firm 360Advantage, run by two admen for the Bush/Cheney campaigns. Its first project was a campaign against "liberal bias" in the media for the neoconservative *Weekly Standard* magazine.

As expected with such a lineup, B-M has a highly confrontational relationship with organized labor. "Companies cannot be caught unprepared by Organized Labor's coordinated campaigns," read the "Labor Relations" section of its website, describing that branch of the company (the section was altered after *The American Prospect* quoted it in March).

Back in 2003, two large unions, UNITE (which later merged with the hotel and restaurant union, HERE) and the Teamsters, launched a major drive to organize 32,000 garment workers and truck drivers at Cintas, the country's largest and most profitable uniform and laundry supply company (it posted $3.4 billion in sales and $327 million in profits last year). Its longtime CEO, Richard Farmer, was a mega-fundraising "Pioneer" for George W. Bush. Cintas was sued for overcharging consumers and denying workers overtime pay—it settled both cases out of court—and was ordered by a California superior court to give employees $1.4 million for not paying them a living wage. It has also maintained unsafe working conditions (an employee in Tulsa died recently when caught in a 300-degree dryer) and, according to union officials, has used any means necessary to block the organizing drive. According to worker complaints

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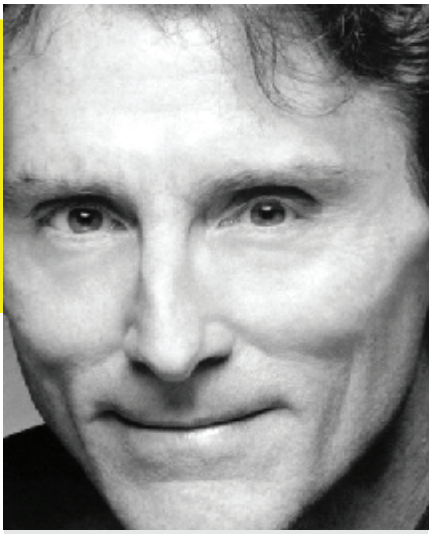

GARY NULL is a leading authority on anti-aging and author of 52 books. His PBS-TV health specials and ABC radio programs have empowered millions and introduced major anti-aging discoveries of Dr. Andrew Weil, Dr. Deepak Chopra, and Dr. Dean Ornish to the American public.

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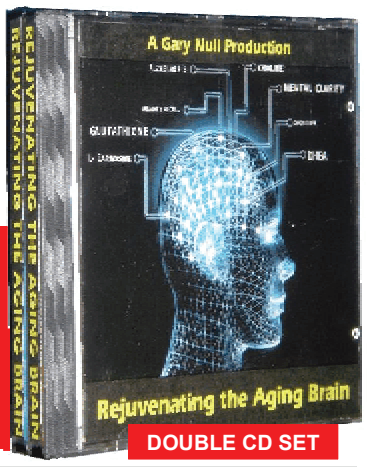

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documented by the unions, management fired employees on false grounds, vowed to close plants and screened antiunion videos. A plant manager in Vista, California, threatened to "kick driver-employees with his steel-toed boots," according to a complaint UNITE HERE filed with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). To put a soft face on its harsh tactics, Cintas hired Wade Gates, a top employee in B-M's Dallas office, as its chief spokesman. Gates coined Cintas's shrewd response to labor: "the right to say yes, the freedom to say no," which has been repeated endlessly in the press. In a speech at USC Law School last year, he outlined Cintas's strategy, calling for an "aggressive defense against union tactics." Says Ahmer Qadeer, an organizer for UNITE HERE, "It's the Burson influence that's made Cintas much, much slicker than they were." The unions have won two NLRB rulings against Cintas, but for four years the company has continued to resist the organizing campaign. Penn disclaimed any responsibility for B-M's activities before his arrival at the firm, and he told *The Nation* he has "never personally participated in any antiunion activity," even though B-M's antilabor arm is still operating under his tenure. (Penn added a personal note: "My father was for many years a union organizer in the poultry workers union.")

It's hard to see how her advisers' corporate work doesn't reflect poorly on Clinton's progressive political claims.

In 2004 Hillary Clinton asked for an investigation into whether Cintas had received preferential regulatory treatment from the Environmental Protection Agency in return for giving large political donations to President Bush. Union officials say she's been supportive of their organizing drive. She's a co-sponsor of the Employee Free Choice Act, which would let workers form unions if a majority sign cards authorizing representation, thus avoiding coercion and intimidation during union election campaigns (Cintas bitterly opposes the EFCA). She told the International Association of Firefighters recently, "I believe that it is absolutely essential to the way America works that people be given the right to organize and bargain collectively."

Hillary apparently sees no contradiction between her advocacy and the antiunion work of her chief strategist's company. "Clearly not," says spokesman Wolfson. "I don't think it reflects on her at all. Mark's work away from the campaign is Mark's work, and his campaign work is separate from that."

Penn recently told the *Washington Post*, in a largely flattering profile, that he'd been "cleared of all client responsibilities, except for Microsoft, for the duration of the campaign." Microsoft is a strange exception, given that it was the corporate entity the Clinton Administration challenged most directly. Moreover, Penn has no plans to take a formal leave from B-M. (Because B-M is a subsidiary of the WPP Group, a British company, it doesn't have to report its CEO's salary or ownership stake in the company.) George W. Bush forced Karl Rove to sell his direct-mail business in 1999, but don't expect a similar move from Hillary. Her campaign pays Penn's polling firm, which is part of B-M. "Senator Clinton is no different, frankly, from Mark's other clients," Howard Paster says. "Burson-Marsteller is a lot bigger firm than Senator Clinton. There's a whole 'nother life we live."

Yet occasionally the work of Penn's company spills onto Hillary's political terrain. Penn's polling firm has worked with the Clean and Safe Energy Coalition—a PR front group for the nuclear power industry—which purports to show "strong support among Americans for nuclear energy." Coincidentally, one of B-M's big projects is the Indian Point nuclear power plant, twenty-four miles north of Manhattan, dubbed by environmentalists "Chernobyl on the Hudson." The plant received the lowest safety rating from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in 2000, and after 9/11 there were widespread calls from environmentalists, consumer groups and elected officials to shut it down. It has had nine unplanned shutdowns since 2005.

With the help of B-M, Indian Point's owner, Entergy Corporation, struck back with a multipronged ad campaign. Its post-9/11 slogan, "Safe, secure, vital," emphasized security, warning that if Indian Point were closed New York could face a California-style energy crisis. In 2003, after Westchester County legislators passed resolutions condemning Indian Point, B-M set up a classic astroturf group on Entergy's behalf, the Campaign for Affordable Energy, Environmental and Economic Justice, which targeted Democratic incumbents in low-income sections of Westchester who supported closing the plant. If Indian Point were shuttered, the bilingual campaign informed residents, electricity bills would increase, power to public transportation would be jeopardized and dirty power plants would go up in low-income and minority neighborhoods. At the same time, B-M unveiled another organization also bankrolled by Entergy that promoted Indian Point. Following the '06 elections, Entergy unveiled a new slogan, "Right for New York," citing Indian Point as an asset in the fight against global warming. Hillary has called for an "independent safety assessment" but has declined to join Governor Eliot Spitzer and twelve members of Congress in urging that the plant be shut down. Entergy, founded in Arkansas, was a major supporter of Bill Clinton in the 1990s and contributed generously to Hillary in 2000 and 2006.

It's difficult to tell where Penn's corporate life ends and his political one begins. Most Democratic consultants do some business work—it's the easiest way to pay the bills. Yet nobody wears as many hats—and advises as many corporations—as Penn. "Penn and Schoen have displayed a thirst for corporate work, often in conflict with the policy agendas of their political clients, that has long set the bar among Democratic pollsters," wrote Democratic pollster Mark Blumenthal on his blog recently. Furthermore, few Democratic consultants so consistently and publicly advocate an ideology that perfectly complements their corporate clients. Every election cycle Penn discovers a new group of swing voters—"soccer moms," "wired workers," "office park dads"—who happen to be the key to the election and believe the same thing: "Outdated appeals to class grievances and attacks upon corporate perfidy only alienate new constituencies and ring increasingly hollow," Penn has written. Through his longtime association with the Democratic Leadership Council, Penn has been pushing pro-corporate centrism for years. Many of the same companies that underwrite the DLC, such as Eli Lilly, AT&T, Texaco and Microsoft, also happen to be clients of Penn's.

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Penn's views often clash with the work of other Democratic pollsters. Half a dozen former PSB staffers say Penn has stretched to get the answers he wanted, including manipulating data, phrasing misleading questions and shifting the demographics of those polled, whether it was for the Clinton campaign in 1996 or a corporate client like Procter & Gamble. For example, Penn was insistent that Clinton's poll numbers in '96 match his poll numbers in '92, say two staffers who worked at PSB during the campaign. If Clinton was underperforming, Penn would artificially add more Democratic-aligned groups to the survey sample to make Bill look better. "He was a great showman, and he'd paint you a nice picture," says one former staffer who worked with Penn in the late '90s. "But the way he got you the data—it was cooked." Staffers who left started a PSB survivors message board documenting what they perceived as personally abusive and unethical behavior in the workplace.

When presented with these allegations, Penn said, "Polling in '96 was 100 percent accurate, to the point," adding, "no staffer you could have talked to ever attended any meeting with any of the clients." He insists that "all weightings and question wording turned out to be accurate." Former partner Doug Schoen adds, "No data was ever manipulated…. There was never any discussion of the polling from 1992 during 1996." In response to the complaints on the message board, Penn dismissed "a nearly decade-old anonymous site with inaccurate material from an unhappy few."

Clients have usually been uninterested in Penn's methodology because they liked his results. But not always. Al Gore fired Penn as his pollster before the 2000 Democratic primaries, in part because he wanted to move in a more populist direction and in part because he didn't trust him. Penn "would write polls to get the result he felt was important," Tony Coelho, Gore's campaign chair, told *Rolling Stone*. Recently two poll interviewees accused the Denver-based field office of Penn's firm, PSA Interviewing, of conducting misleading telephone polls in California and New Hampshire. The interviewers read to respondents statements like "John Edwards chose not to run for another Senate term because he didn't think he could win, abandoning the fight in Congress against the administration," and "Barack Obama failed to vote in favor of abortion rights nine times as a state senator." Hillary, by contrast, is presented as someone who "was born into a middle-class home where she learned the value of hard work and frugality." At the end of the script the poll asks, "Based on what you've heard, who would you choose as the Democratic candidate for President: Hillary Clinton, John Edwards or Barack Obama?" In response to these accusations, Penn said the charges were false and that "this firm conducts standard political and market research polls…and does not do push polling." He would not confirm or deny that the questions above came from PSA.

These days Penn's few political clients lean to the right. He worked on Joe Lieberman's ill-fated presidential run and the Venezuelan recall referendum in 2004 and Italian billionaire Silvio Berlusconi's unsuccessful re-election campaign last year.

Yet despite his outsized role in the corporate world, his company's close ties to GOP operatives and questions about his polling techniques, Penn remains a leading figure in Hillary's campaign, pitching the inevitability of her nomination to donors and party bigwigs. According to the *New York Times*, "[Hillary] Clinton responds to Penn's points with exclamations like, Oh, Mark, what a smart thing to say!" His presence means that triangulation is alive and well inside the campaign and that despite her populist forays, Hillary won't stray far from the center or think too big. "Penn has a lot of influence on her, no doubt about it," says New York political consultant Hank Sheinkopf, who worked with Penn in '96. "He's not going to let her drift too far left."

White House in Exile

Penn's not the only major player in Hillary's corporate orbit. There's also the Glover Park Group, a fast-rising lobbying and PR firm known as the "White House in Exile" because it's packed with former Clintonites. Its roster includes former Clinton press secretary Joe Lockhart and deputy chief of staff Joel Johnson. From Hillary's orbit come Peter Kauffman, her former press secretary, and Gigi Georges, her New York director. Campaign manager Patti Solis Doyle used to work there, and until recently so did Howard Wolfson.

Wolfson, a pugnacious operative who's said he admires Karl Rove's skills, took a leave of absence in March (unlike Penn), though he still has a stake in the firm. Partners at Glover Park downplay connections to Hill and Bill, but the association—along with the Democratic takeover of Congress—has been good for business. Glover Park was Washington's fastest-growing private company in 2005. The day before the 2006 election it got a huge infusion of private-equity cash from a firm in Chicago, Svoboda, Collins. Business has doubled since then. No one at Glover Park is now officially part of the Clinton campaign, yet there are plenty of unofficial relationships. Johnson, for example, is giving to and raising money for Hillary. The firm still lobbies her office, as it presumably would a Clinton II White House.

Glover Park's clients have included standard liberal groups like the United Federation of Teachers and the ACLU. Yet the Clinton ties have also helped the firm make an alliance with Rupert Murdoch. Hillary started cozying up to Murdoch after her 2000 Senate victory, in a calculated attempt to defang his conservative media empire, News Corp. In 2004 the billionaire required a favor of his own: Nielsen was preparing to change the way it measured viewership in US TV markets, a plan that Murdoch's Fox network feared would cost it millions in ad revenue. So Murdoch called on Glover Park. Wolfson secured a $200,000 contract and unveiled a PR blitz under the guise of a supposedly independent minority front group called Don't Count Us Out. The group played on fears of voter disenfranchisement, arguing that minorities would be undercounted in the new system. Don't Count Us Out ran more than 100 ads in two days, and Nielsen was deluged with hate mail. Letters of support came in from politicians, including Senator Clinton, who warned, "Nielsen would be remiss in pushing forward with its rollout plan." The campaign eventually fizzled when influential supporters, including Jesse Jackson, realized that Glover Park's claims were bogus and viewers were simply moving from broadcast channels like Fox to cable. Yet Murdoch kept Glover Park on retainer and held a $60,000 fundraiser for Clinton last July. News Corp. executive Peter Chernin is hosting a top-dollar shindig for her in LA in late May. Asked what she thought of Murdoch, Clinton spokesman Phillippe Reines told *The New Yorker*, "Senator Clin-

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ton respects him and thinks he's smart and effective."

News Corp. wasn't an exception for Glover Park. It's used similar tactics on behalf of another frequent Democratic bête noire—the pharmaceutical industry. As with Penn, it's been difficult to tell where business ends and politics begins. In the run-up to passage of the Medicare Modernization Act in 2003, Johnson (who partnered with disgraced former Tom DeLay staffers and associates of Jack Abramoff at his previous lobbying job) lobbied for the industry's chief arm, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA). Last summer, as the law came under scrutiny from both liberals and conservatives, he wrote a memo to Hill staffers arguing that "early polls call into question the political value in strongly attacking the weakness in the Medicare prescription drug plan." Johnson failed to note that he was on the industry's payroll, as were other firms whose work he cited. After the election Glover Park inked deals with drugmakers Amgen and Pfizer to block a proposal to lower drug prices under Medicare and help the latter slash 10,000 workers this year and close five manufacturing sites.

Glover Park has also been trying to get liberals to support a program called Medicare Advantage. According to the federally run Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, this privately run plan overcharges the government by 12 percent compared with traditional Medicare. And it paves the way for privatization. As a result, Congressmen like Pete Stark and Charlie Rangel want to redirect some of the money toward children's healthcare. That proposal has drawn fierce resistance from America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), which has recruited Glover Park and another Democratic firm, the Dewey Square Group, to argue that cutting benefits to Medicare Advantage would disproportionately hurt low-income and minority enrollees (note a pattern?), a claim the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities calls "distorted" and "based on misleading use of data." Nevertheless, former Hillary spokesman Peter Kauffman has asked community groups in New York to join a Medicare Advantage minority advisory committee, which now includes former big-city mayors and the NAACP. And Glover Park put out polling, in conjunction with a GOP firm and AHIP, that shows "record high satisfaction" among enrollees, according to Johnson. Hillary was supportive of the Medicare Advantage program during the debate over Medicare but voted against the final bill. She hasn't commented on whether she favors preserving the current system.

Murdoch and PhRMA aren't the only odd couples to enlist the Clintonites. There's also the government of Dubai, which has paid Bill handsomely for speeches and strategic advice. Around the time of the furor over the proposed management of US ports by Dubai Ports World, Glover Park launched a lobbying drive to broker the sale of two US military plants to the government-owned Dubai International Capital. The two New York senators led opposition to the ports deal but didn't raise objections to the plant takeover. According to *Newsday*, the $100,000 contract was routed through the LA law firm of Raj Tanden, brother of Hillary's top domestic policy adviser, Neera Tanden.

Glover Park has also fronted for Verizon to kill "net neutrality" and allow telecom companies to charge more for certain Internet content, for the insurance industry on asbestos claims, for Ernst & Young on immunity from shareholder lawsuits and for the Swift banking coalition's collaboration with the Bush Administration on "antiterror" financial records.

Partners at Glover Park say business is business—if their work puts them at odds with fellow Democrats, so be it. "On some days you're working on the other side of an issue from a Democratic Congressman," says Johnson. "The next day you're helping them raise money." It's a world Hillary knows well.

The Compromised Candidate

It's hard to see how her advisers' corporate work doesn't reflect poorly on Clinton's progressive claims or create a liability for her with Democratic voters. There's no evidence that she has taken a position specifically to benefit one of her advisers' clients or a top supporter. More likely, the ties to corporate America, along with the bruises of past defeats, have limited what she believes is possible and will fight to achieve. "If you surround yourself by people who live off of big corporations, that's going to affect the advice they give you and your own worldview," says a former Clinton adviser.

Clinton has a consistently liberal Senate voting record, earning near-perfect scores from Americans for Democratic Action. She's fought to get New York its fair share of federal money after 9/11 and has advocated for long-neglected, though politically safe, issues like children's health and veterans care. Yet voting records capture only so much. Since the healthcare reform disaster of 1993–94, she has rarely stuck her neck out on contentious issues. "She votes the issues that come up, rather than take the leadership role," says Joan Claybrook, president of Public Citizen. "We tried to do too much, too fast twelve years ago," Clinton told the Federation of American Hospitals last year, "and I still have the scars to show for it." She's now the number-one Congressional recipient of donations from the healthcare industry.

Clinton's rarely been the threat to the business community that many on the right typically allege. She's often partnered with Republicans like Newt Gingrich and Bill Frist. In 2002 she backed a harsh position on welfare reform reauthorization that put her at odds even with conservative Republicans like Orrin Hatch. She persuaded her husband to veto the bankruptcy bill in 1997, voted for a similar version in 2001 and missed the vote in 2005, when Bill was in the hospital. She advocated weakening the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform law, telling Feingold to "live in the real world." Unlike Edwards and Obama, she accepts campaign contributions from lobbyists and corporate PACs. "Ask *them* why they don't take money from lobbyists," Wolfson retorts. "We're proud of our support."

The conservative caricature that Hillary is to the left of her husband is a myth. She, like Bill, talks a good game. She's aggressively courted organized labor and distanced herself from policies like NAFTA. She privately tells public-interest groups and liberal commentators that she's on their side. At the same time, she's premised her presidential campaign on a restoration of the Clinton era, frequently invoking "Bill and I" on the stump as a way of claiming credit for the perceived successes of the 1990s. She's expressed no qualms about her closest advisers' forays into the corporate world. Courting elements of the Democratic base while signaling to the corporate right that she won't shake up the system is a tricky juggling act. Even the First Lady of triangulation may not be able to pull it off. ■

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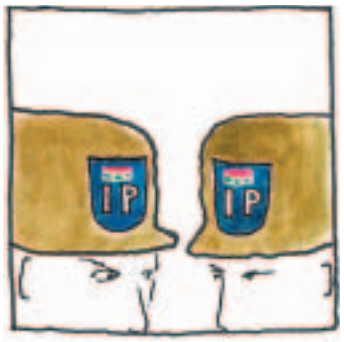
SPENCER ACKERMAN

Baghdad

Tucked into the corner of Major Ali's mirror is a postcard displaying the handsome, airbrushed visage of Imam Hussein, the venerated Shiite martyr. Ali probably needs no reminder of sacrifice when he sees his tired reflection. His office on the second floor of the Khadimiya Police Station has become his second home. Yellowing papers erupt from their folders, which in turn burst out onto every available inch of space, from the overstuffed filing cabinets to the small cot nearby. Ali handles logistics, finance and personnel for this police station in a famous Shiite neighborhood just west of the Tigris River, centered around one of Iraq's most important Shiite shrines. But despite his own Shiite faith, it's often not safe for him to return home.



CAITLIN DOVER

One of the reminders of Ali's sacrifice is a framed photograph on his cluttered desk. In it, his young son wears the oversized camouflage helmet of Lieut. Jonathan Sherrill, a 24-year-old from Charlotte, North Carolina, who leads a platoon of the 57th Military Police Company, which oversees fifteen police stations like Khadimiya here in western Baghdad. Sherrill doesn't smile much out on patrol, but in the photograph the diminutive lieutenant wears a grin almost as large as the one plastered on Ali's overjoyed son. When Sherrill walks into Ali's office on a March afternoon, the besieged major's chubby, mustachioed face lights up. An aide rushes to bring sodas for Ali's friend.

"He's one of the hardest-working IPs I've ever met," Sherrill tells me, using the ubiquitous military acronym for Iraqi Police. "He's doing good, and making sure the station gets what it needs." But what the station—and Iraq—needs is not solely measured in items on an acquisition order. Roving the hallways are men only nominally controlled by the police chain of command. "I'm happy with the loyalty of many of the men," Ali tells me after he finishes briefing Sherrill on the day's progress. "But we're suffering with the newer IPs, because I don't know exactly if they come from a militia or some political party." It's a fear echoed by practically every IP commander the 57th becomes partners with. Several told me that many of their police are little more than militiamen in uniform.

"If they belong to the religious guys, it poisons their mind," Ali continues. "Now, in the station, the guys who join can collect information on the other sects. When they get into civilian clothes, they go out and kill the other sect." Ali shrugs. "I have no control over that." The bed in his office underscores both his hard work and the fact that many of his own officers, like the insurgents they are supposed to fight, have placed Ali under siege. Some are suspicious of his closeness with the US military. Some will kill him as part of inter-Shiite factional strife. Others will simply target him for money.

Out of this material comes the long-term US strategy in Iraq. This year's troop surge—an infusion of five combat brigades to Baghdad, along with an additional 2,200 military police and thousands more support forces—brought a return to greater American combat operations, but commanders emphasize that the ultimate goal remains preparing Iraqis to secure their country. Since June 2006, this task has fallen, in part, to the 57th. The company doesn't provide direct training to the IPs; but it advises them on a relentless routine of manning checkpoints, neighborhood patrols, logistics maintenance, payroll and strengthening the chain of command.

"We make them operate their system for when we're not here anymore," explains Capt. Rob McNellis, the 57th's 30-year-old company commander. "If we can help, then absolutely, we'll give them everything we've got, but the focus has shifted." That focus has, by all accounts, yielded improvements in Iraqi police competence. The days when policemen ran from the insurgency are mostly over.

These days the danger is the opposite: that militia-loyal policemen, mostly Shiite here in Baghdad, will use their increased US-gained skills to scourge their Sunni enemies. McNellis and his superiors contend that while they cannot end infiltration, they can curb militia abuses. They hope that the mentorship they provide will force the police to rise above its maculate origins. "There is militia infiltration to varying degrees at the stations," says McNellis, "but nothing succeeds like success."

The militias hardly command the loyalty of every policeman. But police commanders warn that sectarianism has seeped thoroughly into the security apparatus, and it threatens to undermine everything McNellis and his colleagues have accomplished. The professional police they desire may instead become a sharper instrument of sectarian fury.

McNellis is a tall, good-humored officer whose ears jut out slightly from his high-and-tight blond haircut. He is responsible for Khadimiya and Saliyah Police Districts, a sixty-square-mile section of western Baghdad home to nearly 2 million people and policed by approximately 3,000 Iraqis. This early March day has been a good one for the Iraqi police, as officers at Saliyah headquarters are happy to report to McNellis when he comes in on an inspection. Off of Haifa Street, a thoroughfare once so dangerous it earned the nickname Purple Heart

Spencer Ackerman, a journalist based in Washington, DC, is a senior correspondent for The American Prospect *and a national security correspondent for* The Washington Monthly. *Research support was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.*

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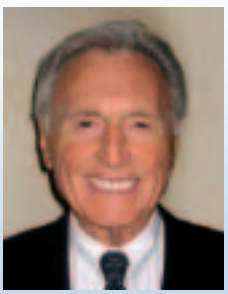

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Boulevard, the police received a tip about a possible car bomb. At IP request, a platoon from the 57th went to investigate along with a team of Iraqi explosive specialists. "It took a little while, but they cleared up the area and then blew up the [car bomb] in place," McNellis says, with evident pride. A good day for the IPs is a good day for him.

However tense, the company has seen many good days since the surge began. In February Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki began his contribution to the surge, known as Fardh al-Qanoon, or "Enforcing the Law." It has made Baghdad a city of endless checkpoints and roadblocks manned by Iraqi police and army units. To reduce the danger from car bombs, the security forces have made driving through the city as difficult as possible. In Khadimiya, there are more checkpoints than there are heavy concrete barriers, leading Iraqi police to limit mobility on the streets with air conditioners and engine blocks.

'Fifty percent of the recruits belong to militias. They come here to collect information on the other sects.'
—Iraqi police colonel

Baghdadis are so desperate for security that many seem willing to endure higher US visibility as its price—within limits. Around ten of Baghdad's more violent neighborhoods, US troops are constructing massive concrete walls along sectarian fault lines, suggesting to many Iraqis that the United States and its proxies are seeking to redraw the city's map for their own benefit. After I left, Adhimiya, the last Sunni bastion east of the Tigris, was home to a massive protest that, ironically, united Sunnis and Shiites against America's so-called "gated communities."

Khadimiya is not as restive, something difficult to believe from its outward appearance. Throughout the neighborhood hang full-color posters of Muqtada al-Sadr, the radical cleric whose Mahdi Army militia is held responsible for innumerable sectarian murders. But when the 57th travels through the neighborhood, it meets little resistance. In fact, the beginning of the surge brought a "significant and obvious reduction" in attacks on the company, McNellis says—a prospect that both reassures and unsettles him. "What I fear is, this is just the calm before the storm," he says. "To go down a road where there was a constant [roadside bomb] presence to now being nothing—if I was an insurgent commander, I'd be taking the time to lay low and adjust."

The surge bolsters the 57th's slow successes. It took months of relentless work to get the IPs to stick to procedure: showing up in uniform, for instance, or obtaining warrants before a raid. "The IPs have come a long way, in terms of training, proficiency, the maintenance of their vehicles and command and control of their people in both districts." McNellis's efforts, in other words, are bearing fruit. "The momentum is now on our side," he says. "We really can finish what we've begun."

But the initial promise of Fardh al-Qanoon has begun to unravel. Sectarian murders in Baghdad are down to a third of what they were before the surge, according to US officials. A United Nations report on human rights, however, blasted the Iraqi government for refusing to release statistics on civilian casualties—and nevertheless found that by the end of March, violent deaths had begun to tick back up, with "large numbers" of Iraqis "experienc[ing] intimidation and killings." A US official conceded to the *Washington Post* in May that, overall, attacks have "stayed relatively constant" since the troop buildup began. On April 12 insurgents destroyed the Sarafiya Bridge, a crucial artery across the Tigris, while also brazenly killing eight in the cafeteria of the Iraqi Parliament, deep within the US-secured Green Zone. Insurgents have increased mortar attacks on the Green Zone to the point where the US Embassy has ordered its personnel to wear body armor while walking around an area that used to be an oasis of calm. Despite the high-profile violence, McNellis tells me in May that the 57th hasn't come under increased attack.

The broader problem is that sectarianism remains deeply entrenched. Gen. David Petraeus, the highly regarded commanding general in Iraq, has stated that success can only come through a political settlement. Yet practically every significant reconciliation effort pushed by the United States—a relaxation of the de-Baathification law, a more equitable distribution of the nation's oil wealth, a new round of provincial elections—has bogged down in Parliament. Popular sentiment is no less divided. According to a March poll by ABC News, more than 95 percent of Sunnis believe Baathists should be allowed back into government positions, while two-thirds of Shiites and Kurds reject the idea. Only 4 percent of Sunnis believe their lives will improve over the next year, though 51 percent of Shiites remain optimistic.

Iraq's tattered social fabric creates an acute problem for the 57th. The security apparatus is the most important instrument for sectarian domination, insuring that militia infiltration continues within the IPs. It's not a dynamic any military unit has the power to reverse. But by pushing the police to follow procedure—processing warrants, keeping track of detainees, constant patrolling—McNellis seeks to overwhelm sectarianism through the introduction of a professional *esprit de corps*. "In terms of the IPs, when the community truly believes in the IPs, that will spread, and the second- and third-order effects will come out, and people will say, 'Hey, the IPs are legit,'" he explains. "The insurgency can't be effective if a majority of the community buys into what we're trying to do here."

The company sees such a buy-in emerging as "the IPs' response time has improved and they're around a whole lot more," says Lieut. Jonathan Wellman. When the 57th canvasses the local population, "lots of them have great things to say." Sectarianism likely influences the response. The ABC poll found 87 percent confidence in the police among Shiites nationwide, but only 24 percent among Sunnis. In the context of Iraq's sectarian war, increased police proficiency might actually yield a reduction in legitimacy among the faction that feels victimized.

Ali's cousin is Colonel Haider, the commander of Khadimiya Police Station. Like Ali, Haider is a thick man with a black mustache and well-pomaded hair. When he sees Sherrill he gives the lieutenant a thorough update on where he's ordered stepped-up patrols in advance of a diplomatic conference. He gives high marks to his men's raiding skills and his ability to

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obtain search warrants. But Haider returns to the persistent problem. "Fifty percent of the recruits belong to the militias," he says. "They come here to collect information on the other sects." He goes further. "The MOI knows everything about who they are."

The MOI is the Ministry of Interior, arguably the most powerful department in the Iraqi bureaucracy. It has control of the police, and since 2005 it has been an instrument of Shiite political power. Under the previous minister, Bayan Jabr, thousands of Sunni officials were purged from the ministry, and in November 2005 US forces discovered torture chambers filled with Sunni victims and Shiite militiamen working for the MOI. Jabr's replacement, Jawad Bolani, is considered less radical, but according to Haider and other police commanders, militia infiltration of the IPs still occurs with official backing. In April the *Post* reported that the MOI, with Maliki's blessing, issues arrest warrants for commanders deemed too aggressive against Shiite militias. "Corruption is everywhere in the police. They don't have much experience to do their jobs. We don't know where they come from, but they're assigned here," Haider says. "We go station to station searching for officers, but most of [the men] we get don't know the area. Most just belong to the militias."

Opinions differ as to whether IP complaints about the MOI represent buck-passing. According to Capt. David Martin of the 92nd Military Police Battalion, most IPs end up assigned to the stations that recruited them. Once a prospective officer is vetted, he goes through academy training on the MOI grounds in eastern Baghdad. However, the MOI has the power to reassign any officer to any station, raising the prospect among police commanders that the MOI orders militiamen into select stations. Haider gets nervous when I press him about MOI complicity with the militias. He picks up a can of Pepsi from his desk. "I can't say anything about the MOI, but here's an example. This is a soda. You know what it is, and what it consists of."

The problem runs deeper than the Interior Ministry. Every significant political organization in Iraq fields its own militia as an insurance policy against losing power. For the United States to insist on total militia demobilization would require a massive expansion of the war and cost it whatever Iraqi allies it still has—with no certainty of success. "My own personal view is that it's not realistic to expect in this country for militia groups to be eliminated altogether," says Col. Mike Galloucis, commander of the 89th Military Police Brigade, the parent unit of the 57th. "Militia groups are interwoven throughout the fabric of the country, including the government. But you can always go after bad behavior. You can establish the basic principle of what's acceptable and unacceptable: the notion that everyone accepts the law, no one is above the law, and if you violate it—and I don't care what your sect or your name is—you will be punished." Galloucis's approach led to the firing of several top police generals last fall after the colonel presented Bolani with "a thick packet" of information detailing their corruption.

The result is a trade-off. Police stations do not face US-pushed mass purges of corrupt officers, which would risk further destabilizing a maturing force. But as long as militiamen remain in the police, official cover will exist for kidnappings, murders and other human rights abuses, undermining the rule of law that Galloucis seeks to promote. Proof of specific police complicity in sectarian attacks can be hard to acquire, limiting US ability to get Iraqi commanders to take action. "You can buy a police uniform downtown," McNellis points out.

Some cases demand direct US action. West of Khadimiya is the Shula police station. Last year the 57th came under frequent attack when convoying to the heavily Shiite Shula neighborhood, which McNellis describes as "death squad territory." Company intelligence found the Shula police to be complicit, so in October, the 57th relinquished support for the station. "If they're involved in attacks, why should we train them?" The problems in Shula continue. In March McNellis learned that the station was holding a man captive without documenting his arrest—a prime indicator that the police or an affiliated death squad would execute him. The second battalion of the 12th Cavalry Regiment marched into Shula and took direct custody of the prisoner, most likely saving his life.

In terms of abuse, "a close second," McNellis says, was the Hurriyeh IP station, a dismal outpost responsible for about 500,000 residents in a mostly Shiite area. "The IPs were either involved in extrajudicial killings or IED/EFP [improvised explosive device/explosively formed penetrator] attacks or they let it happen," McNellis remembers. "Hurriyeh was so close to being cut off." A new commander, Colonel Majid, arrived in November and expressed his desire to turn the station around. McNellis

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continues to support Hurriyeh; his confidence was bolstered when soldiers from the first battalion of the 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment moved into the station as part of the surge.

One way Majid approached the problem was to come to a modus vivendi with the militia elements. He freely explains that he can live with a certain amount of infiltration. "More and more IPs and Iraqi Army join with a militia while they work at their jobs, at the same time. Some guys sympathize with the militias, but I can still work with them," Majid, who is bald with a thick mustache, says through translation. "I can't deny that they're here, but just because they sympathize with a militia doesn't mean they can't do their job." His calculation is the same as the Americans'. "When the government becomes better, the militias will collapse," he says, "and when the IPs do their job in a good way, locals will trust the IPs and give them support, so there won't be a rationale for the militias to exist."

Soldiers stress that they still need to focus on strengthening the IPs' chain of command and encouraging them to pay closer attention to detail on logistics and equipment. Overall, however, the 57th gives high marks to its Iraqi police counterparts. On patrols, unarmored IP flatbed trucks carrying officers with thin blue bulletproof vests weave through the streets in formation with US Humvees. But no one believes the IPs in Khadimiya and Saliyah are ready to operate independently. "We wouldn't want to see stations turned over," says Wellman. "The worst thing would be to turn them over too early." There's no consensus on when their fifteen stations will no longer require US mentoring—perhaps next year, perhaps later—but all agree that when the 57th leaves in June another unit must replace it.

That's what the military plans. In April the Pentagon reluctantly announced months-long extensions of all active-duty Army units in the Middle East in order to sustain the surge through the next year; and in May, it announced the summer deployment of 35,000 soldiers as replacements. But time is a rapidly diminishing commodity for the Iraq War. GOP Congressmen warn Bush that the party will be decimated if the war continues through the 2008 elections. No one may be able to agree on a timetable to end the war, but vast majorities in the United States, Iraq and the region desire the departure of US forces. In May, for the first time, a bill demanding that the United States schedule a withdrawal gained majority support in the Iraqi Parliament.

More than four years into the war, the discrepancy between the scope of Iraq's challenges and the ability of the United States to alleviate them is greater than ever. The commander of Iraqi police in western Baghdad, Gen. Saleh Alany, insists that the United States can't leave—"the terrorists would win"—but says the real problem in Iraq is the entire "generation that was born in the 1980s, during the war with Iran," whose minds have been corrupted by violence. He includes his own men in his assessment: "Loyalty is the biggest problem. The security forces don't have loyalty to the country. They're loyal to the different parties, or other forces." Alany's dim view of the new Iraq is surely colored by his status as a veteran of Saddam's Republican Guard. But if he's right, then to improve the quality of the police force entails increasing the lethality of the militias.

Major Ali in Khadimiya needs no reminder. He picks his security detail personally—he must be wary of those assigned to

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guard him because of whom they might actually work for. He fears being transferred to the MOI, and vows to take his men to the ministry with him if he is. "I need to know who they are," he says. "Otherwise, they'd kill me." Sherrill sees help on the way. "It's all about weeding out the bad apples," he says, "and for the most part, we've been doing that." After Sherrill leaves, there will be another lieutenant to lend his helmet to Ali's son, and more US troops to mentor Ali's progress. But even with them there, Ali must still fear the uncertain loyalties of his own men, and what they will do with their newfound skills. ■

Letter From China
by Jehangir S. Pocha

THE LAST 'COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE'

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Pang Qing Xiang climbs furtively up the narrow staircase leading to the private dining rooms of a noodle shop in Liaoyang, a city in northeastern China. He speaks quietly as he takes a seat, and flinches whenever there is a sound or when someone enters the room. That's the price Pang, 60, is still paying for having tried to organize unpaid employees at the ferro-alloy factory where he worked three years ago. Independent trade unions are banned in China, and Pang's incipient unionism got him nine months in prison, where he was often beaten and abused. "To them we were nothing," says Pang, who is still tailed by plainclothes police officers. "Certainly not people who had a right to demand anything, not even pay. When I told them work without pay is slavery, they just laughed."

Global consumers buying $25 Chinese-made DVD players usually assume Chinese labor is cheap because the country has a limitless supply of poor workers. But the morally cumbersome truth is that the Chinese government systematically prevents workers from being paid the full value of their labor. Chinese workers can join several state-controlled unions, but since the state and politically connected clans, or families, own most of the Chinese economy, official union representatives who work too zealously first get a warning smack on the wrist—then worse. Ask Kong Youping. After Kong, a trade union official in Liaoyang, raised the ire of local officials by fighting doggedly for the rights of recently laid-off workers, he was sentenced to fifteen years in prison.

This power imbalance between owners and workers in China means that almost 200 million Chinese workers go to bed every night in overcrowded dormitory rooms after having worked eighteen-hour days in Dickensian factories where some employees are literally worked to death. The phenomenon has even added a new word to the Mandarin vocabulary: *guolaosi*, or overwork death, where fatigued workers fall off their stools bleeding from the ears, nose and anus.

Pang says conditions for Chinese workers could get worse before they get better. China's economic "miracle" has long hinged on five elements: cheap labor, market reforms, disregard for intellectual property rights, loose environmental standards and cheap capital from state-controlled banks. Together, they've offered global investors a unique combination of nineteenth-century business practices and twenty-first-century infrastructure that have allowed China to attract almost $900 billion in direct foreign investment since 1979, mostly in the labor-intensive manufacturing sector.

But China's economic ground realities are changing. Ecological devastation is forcing better environmental standards. Beijing is under pressure from the West to enforce intellectual property rights. And the public listing of major state-owned banks is reducing the banks' ability to make political loans to China's gargantuan state-owned companies. That's left China's cheap and disempowered labor force as the country's only unchanged manufacturing "competitive advantage." The government recognizes it cannot constrain workers and wages forever and is trying to move the Chinese economy up the value chain. But that could take decades. In the meantime, "the exploitation here is getting harsher," according to Han Dongfang, a unionist with the *China Labor Bulletin*, a journal in Hong Kong, who was expelled from China for trying to organize workers in 1993. "On the one hand, we have better laws than ever. But in reality there is no enforcement, and actions always tell you better than words what people really want."

Sun Yi Lin, 38, a construction worker in Beijing who has been living in makeshift housing on work sites for the past twenty years, says conditions for workers and peasants have improved since Chinese President Hu Jintao came to power in 2003. New agriculture policies have helped farmers, reducing the incentive for them to migrate to cities and work as laborers. This, coupled with rising economic standards, raised wages in boom towns like Shanghai by about 15 percent last year. Yet the government is dragging its feet on the creation of a national minimum wage, and the average monthly income for workers remains about $50–$100, depending on location and industry. Also, international organizations trying to address labor rights are being intimidated by authorities, and at least twenty-four labor activists are languishing in Chinese prisons, says the Dui Hua Foundation in San Francisco, which tracks political prisoners in China.

Part of the Communist Party's aversion to independent unions can be explained by an old Chinese proverb: "There cannot be two suns in the sky"—i.e., there can be only one source of power

Jehangir S. Pocha was the Boston Globe*'s China correspondent until March 1, when he became editor of* Businessworld *magazine in India.*

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in the land. "No one knows where a union ends and a political party begins," says Zhang Bijian, head of the Beijing-based think tank China Reform Forum and a close associate of President Hu. "A gradual approach is always more successful, and it's good for everyone. All the other ways will be not good to our people in the end."

Zhang's words betray a common fear here that a Solidarity-type movement led by a charismatic leader like Lech Walesa could sink China into the same turmoil that engulfed the Eastern bloc in 1989. But Han says the argument that independent trade unions will automatically drive China toward democracy is a red herring. He says the specter of chaos and political instability is fearmongering put out by powerful people with a vested interest in denying Chinese workers their rights. "In the US in the 1920s, it was argued that trade unions would turn the country into a Communist state, but it didn't happen," says Han. "Now ironically in China they are saying trade unions will turn the country into a democracy. Isn't that strange?"

Significantly, China's labor policies elicit little criticism from Western governments, even though they fly in the face of international law, including the charter of the International Labor Organization, of which China is a member. When US Labor Secretary Elaine Chao was in Beijing in December, she never raised the subject of independent trade unions in public. Perhaps she was loath to rock a system that's allowing Western corporations and governments to reap huge profits. Low labor costs in China mean big profits for Western companies with factories here. A recent survey of 1,800 US businesses in China by the American Chamber of Commerce in Beijing found that profit margins for 42 percent of them were higher than their average worldwide margins. The export of low-cost goods made in China is also helping to keep global inflation at about 2.5 percent despite recent spurts in oil prices, real estate and stocks, the World Bank says. More significantly, China has invested most of the $1 trillion it has made from its labor-driven exports in US debt, including Treasury bills. This helps the United States fund its deficit and keep its interest rates low, thereby allowing US consumers the cheap credit they need to buy loads of Chinese goods—which begins this cash cycle anew.

Even some US officials and politicians who stir voters by bashing China for taking American jobs usually neglect to mention the country's lack of independent trade unions, despite the fact that this is one of the key reasons Beijing has been able to take away 1.5 million American jobs between 1989 and 2003, according to a report by the Economic Policy Institute. Instead, Treasury Department officials prefer to dwell on Beijing's undervalued currency and its poor enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR). But the bulk of China's exports to the United States are toys, textiles and cheap electronics, which contain little or no intellectual property. Further, China's local value-added to exports—the portion of a product actually built in China—has been calculated by the World Bank to be between 10 and 30 percent of the total product. So even a 20 percent increase in the Chinese currency, the renminbi (RMB), would only raise prices of many Chinese exports by 2 to 6 percent, too small to reduce job losses or the trade deficit significantly. What the emphasis on currency rates and IPR reflects are the interests driving global trade policy. Stronger labor rights might help American and Chinese workers, but they would undercut the competitiveness of foreign corporations with factories in China. A stronger RMB and IPR protections would benefit US corporations that own patents and could sell more of their high-value goods in China.

"Everybody benefits from cheap labor—except the workers themselves, of course," says Han. "Foreign companies have created a race to the bottom, and chase countries for the cheapest labor. In March [2006], when the National People's Congress [China's rubber-stamp parliament] tabled a new labor contract law, the US and European chambers of commerce were the first to come out publicly against it."

The Chinese government recently made good PR use of the fact that it had forced Wal-Mart, a company notorious for preventing its employees from unionizing, to allow a state-run union in its doors. Yet most foreign companies, and particularly local factories manufacturing for foreign companies, still push their employees to work extended shifts without overtime pay, says Han. Last July thousands of workers at the Merton Company in Guangdong, which makes plastic toys for US companies like Disney, Mattel and McDonald's, rioted because they were forced to work eleven hours a day without overtime compensation, according to China Labor Watch, a New York–based NGO.

Still, Han sees hope in China's fledgling legal system. On paper, China's labor laws read like those from any moderately liberal country; it's just that they have never really been enforced. With the legal system expanding, Han and other activists are using the courts to breathe new life into China's laws by filing thousands of labor rights cases. Some activists, such as Gao Zhisheng, a dissident lawyer currently under detention by the government, say they've had little luck in the courts, as the government has short-circuited their cases with a mixture of heavy-handed and velvet-gloved tactics. But Han says he and other supporters have brought thirty labor rights cases to Chinese courts, and somewhat astonishingly, they have won most of them. One case, in which they were representing jewelry workers who'd been fired after developing silicosis, a lung disease contracted by breathing mineral dust, set a record for worker compensation: RMB 500,000 ($62,500) per worker.

While the cases activists are pursuing in the courts are still a drop in the ocean, Han says the important thing is that they are slowly setting precedents. "Through these legal battles we also provide the idea that workers should get together," he says. That's made Han and other labor activists folk heroes with many in China's underclass. The tales of their exploits are creating a discernible change in workers' mindset. "The period of relying on leaders is already gone," says Han. "Today, slowly, people are understanding that they have to fight for their own future." That's potentially seditious talk in China, and like many Chinese who realize they've gone too far, Han relies on an old trick for backup: He quotes Mao. "As Mao used to say, the evolution of history does not follow the will of individuals," he says. "Historical developments happen either way. Today, China is living in a time of darkness, but that does not mean there is no hope. Respect for people's basic rights, limited work hours, decent compensation, better working conditions, laws that are enforced—all these things will happen because it is natural that they do. That's just the process of civilization." ■

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EXCHANGE
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)
try. But the main challenge, according to Phelps and others, revolves around how new SDSers relate to the twists and turns of the original SDS. This is misguided; although these young activists opened up a can of worms by reviving the name SDS, they have, thankfully, not concerned themselves with settling yesterday's battles. A focus on the squabbles of the past distracts from the real challenges these activists face: namely, how to organize a multifaceted and successful student movement. How to build a democratic national organization that addresses the global complexities of race and class, gender and sexuality, war and environmental collapse. The fault lines of the original SDS will continue to be debated by former members, historians and others. The new SDS, however, should be judged in its own context.

DAN BERGER, *Author*
Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity

New York City

■ "The New SDS" is the latest in a long line of post-'60s articles heralding and dissecting "a new student radicalism," which in a kind of wishful thinking hints at a return to the mass activism of the Vietnam era. Christopher Phelps misses the main question about student politics today, which is, Why is it so dead? The new SDS is a tiny group with almost no campus influence or visibility—including on my campus, NYU, which tends to be relatively activist (which is not saying much). Four years into the Vietnam War, SDS had about 100,000 members and was involved in building a mass antiwar movement on and off the campuses. Four years into the Iraq War, this revived SDS claims a whopping 2,000 members.

When I asked my students about their generation's relative silence on the war, they pointed to the financial pressures of college, the absence of a draft, the Internet's power to draw young people to blog rather than march and despair over changing Bush's policies. The lack of activism is striking, given the university's reputation on the right as a hotbed of radicalism and political correctness.

ROBERT COHEN

Clarksville, NY

■ At the June 1969 convention, where SDS split into three factions (the Progressive Labor Party; the Weathermen, or Revolutionary Youth Movement RYM 1; and RYM 2), I spoke from the podium of the need for SDS to return to its roots as an organization based on participatory democracy. As a freshman at the University of Wisconsin, I and others who had the temerity to suggest that SDS should return to the principles of the Port Huron statement were mocked by the former SDS activists.

The downfall of SDS, as I saw it through the eyes of a 17-year-old activist, and as I still believe today, was the organization's attempt to determine which "Marxist Leninist" model was correct. However, neither the "infantile disorder" of the Weathermen nor the mechanistic formulations of the short-haired "Maoists" of the Progressive Labor Party had any chance of support on college campuses, let alone in the population at large. Given the tremendous potential for a left-wing mobilization after the 1968 election, the failure to maintain the SDS that had existed in the early and mid-1960s was a tremendous loss. Although there has been a failure to maintain continuous left-wing activism on campus since the 1960s, it is encouraging that a new generation has chosen, for whatever reason, to identify with SDS.

PETER HENNER

Chicago

■ US student movements do have a history. The SDS of the 1960s was an outgrowth of SLID (Student League for Industrial Democracy), which in turn was an outgrowth of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, co-founded by Jack London in the 1910s.

Surely there is a place for mutual aid in social evolution as well as natural evolution. Older generations of activists have often come forward to help younger people in their struggles. As a member of SDS in the 1960s, I was especially grateful to such old Wobblies as Fred Thompson, Jenny Velsek and Jack Sheridan, who helped us start the Solidarity Bookshop in Chicago. In more recent times, Studs Terkel, Leon Despres, Vicki Starr, Les Orear and the Illinois Labor History Society have also done much to help young activists in various worthy causes. The MDS has been established to aid, encourage and support the SDS activists of today. There have always been sour-grapes ex-radicals who say they did it better, or that it can't be done, and that today's younger people can't change anything either. Well, phooey on them! The young activists in today's growing SDS are already a creative force in a society that certainly needs them!

PENELOPE ROSEMONT
President, MDS

Old Chatham, NY

■ I think it's great that the new student movement wants to call itself SDS. I take this to mean that it is inspired by the values and the commitment to change the society that characterized the best of the old SDS, and us old SDS people ought to feel pleased and honored by the students' use of the name. But they should be very wary of listening to or taking on much more from us, and we should steer clear of offering any advice. Because SDS largely failed in achieving its vision. So we should say, great, more power to you, here's some money if you need it: Now go out and build your own movement in your own way. If you need a body at a demo we'll be there, but we won't speak and we certainly won't tell you what you should or should not be doing. How the hell do we know?

JIM MONSONIS
SDS National Secretary, 1962–63

PHELPS REPLIES

Mansfield, Ohio

■ In my largely positive overview of the multi-issue organizing of the new SDS, I was compelled to report briefly on the Weather controversy. I did not invent this controversy. It was a source of tension almost from the beginning in SDS's adult counterpart, MDS. It was raised by significant critics, both internal (Jesse Lemisch) and external (Maurice Isserman) and aggravated greatly by Tom Good, who fails here to take responsibility for his pro–Weather remarks—which I quoted with total accuracy.

I am, at 41, much younger than those SDS veterans who still chafe at Weather's arrogance and adventurism, but they have my empathy. The implosion of the 1960s left, its failure to build durable institutions, was a tragedy felt acutely by those of us who came of age on the left during the barren Reagan years. Perhaps a new generation's choice of the name SDS, for all its many upsides, inevitably invited Weather questions, given the way the first SDS was wrecked. It's a tall order to lay claim to a historic name while wishing away a major part of its history.

This difficulty may not be insuperable, but it is compounded by those former Weather leaders, typified by Bernardine Dohrn, who refuse to own up to their destructive role and discourage critical assessment of the past while simultaneously attempting in films and books to wipe the slate clean of their most disastrous acts and ideas. No wonder suspicions persist that such people have not actually "moved on" but are merely biding their time for new opportunities.

Demands that we leave history behind are far from radical. They are the counterpart of "Just Do It," our live-for-the-moment capitalist culture. Effective organizing and action require historical consciousness. Which past approaches were compelling? Which failures? Critical reflection enhances prospects for future success.

My finding, in any case, was that the new SDS is neither emulating Weather nor controlled by boomers. The dozens of students I interviewed are concentrating, quite properly, on ending the Iraq War and other laudable goals. I was impressed by the students' commitment to movement-building, their thoughtfulness about tactics and strategies, and their attempts to build democratic group structures that, because premised on common judgment, will diminish the likelihood of actions that are rash and self-defeating.

I wish I had been able to bring Robert Cohen with me to the Northeast regional SDS meeting that I observed, attended by more than eighty students from two dozen universities, including the New School, Pratt and Pace. There I would have introduced him to Josh Russell and other exceptional young activists who would, I feel certain, have given him reason to hope.

CHRISTOPHER PHELPS

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Why It Happened the Way It Did

RICHARD J. EVANS

FATEFUL CHOICES: Ten Decisions That Changed the World, 1940–1941.
By Ian Kershaw.
Penguin Press. 624 pp. $35.

It's been fascinating following Ian Kershaw's trajectory as a historian over the years. Trained as a specialist in the social and economic history of English monasteries in the Middle Ages, Kershaw changed countries and centuries in the late 1970s, in search of topics more relevant than medieval estate management. Two pathbreaking books were the result: *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (published in German in 1980; translated into English in 1987) and *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933–1945* (1983).

Having begun his research independently, Kershaw had by this time become closely involved with the "Bavaria Project," led by Martin Broszat, then director of the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich. Like other historians working on the project, Kershaw sought to reconstruct the history of Nazi Germany "from the bottom up" by using the extensive reports of the SS Security Service and local government officials on public morale and the voluminous and very detailed accounts of popular opinion smuggled out to the exiled German Social Democratic Party leaders in Prague by agents based in Germany. The resulting picture was complex and highly differentiated. Instead of presenting the conventional postwar clichés of a ruthless dictator bending everyone to his will, Kershaw showed a huge variety of popular responses to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime, ranging from resistance and opposition through dissent and indifference to enthusiasm and praise.

In this vision, relatively few Germans were committed Nazis; most were lulled into acquiescence by Nazi propaganda and Nazi achievements in one or another area, objecting—sometimes with success—only when the regime interfered directly with the innermost values of their daily lives, most notably in matters of religious practice. All of this of course raised the question of how the regime managed to put its policies into effect. In *The "Hitler Myth"* Kershaw showed how the propaganda image of the Führer provided until near the end of the war a repository for people's hopes and aspirations that deflected many of their discontents onto his subordinates or held out the prospect that he would eventually find a remedy. People were reluctant to believe that in reality Hitler was a man driven by a fanatical hatred of the Jews, a boundless desire for conquest and, at bottom, a deep contempt for the mass of ordinary Germans.

Leaders make history, but they do not make it as they please, as Kershaw reminds us in his study of decision-making during WWII.

Kershaw's pioneering study of Hitler's propaganda image thus seemed to point naturally to the next step, a biography of the man himself. After a decade of research, the resulting two volumes—*Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris* (1998) and *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis* (2000), totaling nearly 2,000 pages—established themselves immediately as the standard works on the German dictator. Among their many virtues were their scrupulous scholarship, their meticulous sorting-out of fact from myth and, not least perhaps, Kershaw's new, more relaxed style of writing, displaying a hitherto unsuspected talent for taut narrative, gripping description and the atmospheric re-creation of past events and situations.

Kershaw came to the biography, as he confessed at the time, from the "wrong direction": not from the history of high politics and decision-making but from the

Richard J. Evans is the author of The Coming of the Third Reich *and* The Third Reich in Power, *both published by Penguin Press. A third volume,* The Third Reich at War, *is in preparation.*

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history of everyday life and opinion in Nazi Germany. What resulted was a book that for the first time related Hitler convincingly to his historical context, that showed him as created by his times rather than acting independently upon them. The biography, indeed, rushes impatiently through Hitler's obscure early life, dismisses psychological speculation about his motives (his alleged fears of Jewish ancestry, supposed homosexuality, early failure as a painter, etc.) and devotes only minimal and evidently somewhat irritated attention to the few episodes we know about in his personal life.

In Kershaw's account Hitler appeared, in many ways, as a kind of blank space on which Germans, or rather key groups of them, projected their ambitions and aspirations. As time went on and he came to believe in his own myth, largely fashioned for him by others, Hitler assumed a more decisive—and ultimately disastrous—role in the formulation of policy, especially with regard to the war. This structuralist approach to the dictator's role in the Third Reich has led to the charge, leveled most recently by Christopher Browning in *The Origins of the Final Solution*, that "Kershaw portrays Hitler's role in actual decision making on Jewish policy," as in other areas, as "passive, simply assenting to pressures and proposals from others."

Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that in his latest book, Kershaw returns to the theme of decision-making, this time on a much broader scale. Here he offers a narrative and analysis of ten decisions, each influencing the ones that followed, starting with Britain's decision to fight on in the spring of 1940 and Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union, and moving through Japan's decisions to ally with Germany and Italy and then to strike at Pearl Harbor, the Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini's somewhat belated decision to join the war, US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's decisions to aid the British and then to escalate this into undeclared war against Germany, and Hitler's decisions to declare war on the United States and to attempt the extermination of Europe's Jews. As one might expect from Kershaw's previous record, he does not delve too deeply into the psychology of the world leaders whose actions in 1940 and 1941 shaped the course of World War II, and thus the parameters of the postwar order. Like Hitler in the two-volume biography, they remain remarkably bland and elusive. Indeed, at times they virtually disappear as individual actors altogether. Thus, for example, Kershaw concludes that "the colossal risks which both Germany and Japan were prepared to undertake were ultimately rooted in the understanding among the power-elites in both countries of the imperative of expansion to acquire empire and overcome their status as perceived 'have-not' nations."

Insofar as he is interested in the leaders as individuals, Kershaw is most fascinated by the constraints under which they operated and the broader factors by which their freedom of action was limited. Thus when Hitler rejected the advice of his military leaders to give priority to North Africa and the Mediterranean after the stunning victories they had achieved over France and the other Western European countries in 1940, he was, to be sure, driven by the ideological priority he had always given to the conquest of the Soviet Union. Yet at the same time, Kershaw argues cogently, "the decision to attack and destroy the Soviet Union…was strategically forced upon him. He had to gain victory in the east before Stalin could build up his defenses and before the Americans entered the war."

Such decisions, Kershaw underscores, depended not least on previous decisions made by others, and some of these were less governed by force of circumstance than others. The decision with which he opens the book is a case in point. In late May 1940, as it became clear that France had been defeated and it looked as if the British forces sent to aid the French would be killed or captured before they could be evacuated from the Continent, powerful voices within the British Cabinet, led by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, began to be raised in favor of seeking mediation through the Italians, first via Roosevelt, then, when that failed, in a direct Anglo-French approach to Mussolini. Newly appointed British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had to use all the rhetorical force at his command to quash the idea:

> Signor Mussolini, if he came in as mediator, would take his whack out of us. It was impossible to imagine that Herr Hitler would be so foolish as to let us continue our re-armament. In effect, his terms would put us completely at his mercy. We should get no worse terms if we went on fighting, even if we were beaten, than were open to us now.

If Britain sued for peace, he said, it would be forced to disarm and become a slave state, under a puppet government run by British Fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley. In the event, the French decided to go it alone; their peace feelers were rudely rebuffed by Mussolini, who did indeed want to "take his whack." Nearly 225,000 British troops were evacuated from the Continent at Dunkirk, an event that Churchill's stirring rhetoric remarkably turned from a calamitous defeat into some sort of victory. And Britain fought on.

What would have happened if Halifax and his allies had carried the day in the Cabinet? Here, following Churchill's lead, Kershaw engages in some fascinating counterfactual speculation. Certainly, he argues, in the event of a peace between Britain and Germany in May or June 1940, Hitler would have demanded the sacking of the Churchill administration. But more likely as a successor than the unpopular and discredited Mosley would have been a widely admired politician such as David Lloyd George, Britain's prime minister in World War I and a self-professed admirer of Hitler. Lloyd George indeed envisaged a role of this sort, possibly under a restored King Edward VIII, whose sympathies with Nazi Germany and belief in the need for a separate peace with Hitler were also on record. This would have been something like the regime installed in France in 1940 under the hero of France's army in World War I, Marshal Philippe Pétain, though initially at least without its Fascist leanings. A rival government, possibly under Churchill, might have been set up in Canada. But with Britain effectively on Germany's side, the swelling tide of American aid would have been stopped, and Hitler would have been free to marshal all his forces, whenever he wanted to, for the long-desired invasion of the Soviet Union. And whatever he might say, Hitler would not have waited long before embarking on the dismemberment of the British Empire, contrary to the view expressed by some later historians such as Maurice Cowling, Alan Clark and John Charmley, who have argued that a separate peace with Germany in 1940 would have been the best way to have preserved it.

How legitimate is this kind of speculation? Kershaw is careful not to take it too far; indeed, he does not go much beyond the scenarios painted by Churchill himself on this occasion. Rather than draw imaginative pictures of what might have happened, Kershaw seeks to assess the alternatives open to the decision-makers. He does no more than hint that a peace with Britain in

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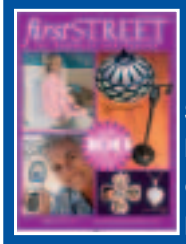

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1940 might have increased the chances of Hitler's defeating the Soviet Union. But in fact, those chances were never very great. Though Germany might have had "all the Continent's material resources at its disposal" in such an event, the Nazi exploitation of the defeated French and other economies was so ruthless that these counted for relatively little in the long run. The Soviet Union defeated Germany largely on its own.

Hitler's decision to invade Russia was made in the summer and autumn of 1940, prompted, Kershaw argues, not least by the German dictator's knowledge that with Britain still in the war, the vast resources of the US economy would soon be pouring into the British war effort in ever-increasing quantities. It is possible to imagine, as Kershaw does, that if the counsels of the German generals had prevailed and the German war effort been directed toward the conquest of North Africa and the Middle East, gaining vast oil reserves desperately needed by the Nazi economy and cutting off the main British supply route to the East through the Suez Canal, the fatal confrontation with the Soviet Union might have been postponed, perhaps indefinitely.

As it was, Hitler got the worst of both worlds. Turning to Mussolini's decision to join the war on the German side after the crushing defeat of France, Kershaw portrays the Italian elites as avid for a share of the spoils. Remaining neutral would have enabled Italy to have husbanded its weak resources in the traditional manner by playing one side off against the other. Mussolini should, perhaps, have remembered the sarcastic remark of a Russian negotiator at a peace conference in the late nineteenth century, that since the Italians were demanding an increase in their territory, he supposed they must have lost another battle. Disappointed with Hitler's refusal to accede to his demands in the West, Mussolini made the fatal decision to invade Greece. Soon, Italian military failures there and in North Africa had sucked the Germans into a theater of war in which they did not really want to fight.

Hitler would later complain that this diversion of German resources cost him the war by forcing him to postpone the invasion of Russia, officially known as Operation Barbarossa. If the invasion had taken place earlier, he claimed, the Germans could have defeated the Red Army before the rains bogged down the German advance in the fall. But as Kershaw points out, bad weather in May and early June would have postponed the invasion anyway. What is more, in the first weeks of the Russian campaign, Hitler anticipated victory well before the fall. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops were surrounded and killed or captured in vast encircling movements driven forward by fast-moving German armor backed up by complete German domination of the skies. The collapse of the Soviet regime seemed imminent.

In late October 1940 Roosevelt assured Americans that 'your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign war.' But he knew better.

Responsibility for the Russians' near defeat, Kershaw argues, must lie principally with Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, whose decision to ignore the warnings pouring in from intelligence agents about an impending German invasion in June 1941 forms the subject of another chapter. What alternatives were open to Stalin? One that was put to him by leading generals the previous month was to launch a pre-emptive strike. The documentary traces of this have provided fuel for those who have tried to argue that Hitler invaded in order to stop the Red Army from marching westward. But Kershaw persuasively rejects this "far-fetched interpretation." Operation Barbarossa had been in preparation for many months before the idea of a pre-emptive strike by the Red Army was first mooted. Therefore the strike was to have been a defensive move.

After the war, one of its principal authors, Gen. Georgi Zhukov, admitted it would probably have been a dismal failure anyway. The Red Army and its leadership had been crippled by Stalin's purges in the late 1930s. The frantic arms program launched in 1939 had not gotten very far; Stalin did not think the Soviet military would be in a position to fight the Germans successfully until 1942. He rejected the idea out of hand. "Have you gone mad?" he exploded: "Do you want to provoke the Germans?" Stalin knew how poorly prepared his forces were, and he was playing desperately for time, even continuing deliveries of goods and raw materials under the Nazi-Soviet Pact signed in 1939 up to six days before the invasion.

Ideologically blinkered, the Soviet dictator would not tolerate any dissent from his own complacent assessment of the situation. Kershaw does not say what Stalin's ideological preconceptions were, but as a good Marxist-Leninist, Stalin was convinced that Hitler's regime was the tool of German monopoly capitalism, so that if he made available everything German business wanted, there would be no immediate reason to invade. Moreover, he thought it inconceivable that Hitler would launch an invasion while the war with Britain was still in progress. Surely the German dictator was aware of the folly of waging a war on two fronts? But Hitler held the Soviet Union in boundless contempt. One push, he thought, and the whole edifice of Communism would come crashing down.

It did not. By the end of 1941 the German armies had been fought to a standstill before Moscow, and though they made further, major advances in 1942, the factor most feared by Hitler, the growth of US aid for Britain and to a lesser extent also the Soviet Union, now came increasingly into play. Kershaw devotes two chapters to decisions made by Roosevelt. On October 30, 1940, the President promised American mothers and fathers: "Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign war." By this time, he had already long been convinced that German expansionism posed a fundamental threat to the United States. He was right.

As Kershaw remarks, Hitler had always envisaged in the longer term "a war of the continents" in which a German-dominated Europe would launch a final struggle for world supremacy with the United States. But Roosevelt knew that he would never get Congress to support a declaration of war on Germany. So he preceded cautiously, step by step, to shore up first the British and then the Soviet war effort. "I do not think we need worry about any possibility of Russian domination," he declared shortly after the launching of Operation Barbarossa. Lend-lease, which made available vast quantities of war materiel to Britain and later Russia, was followed by the Atlantic Charter, implicitly allying the United States with Britain by stating the common democratic principles they sought to uphold, while a clash between a German U-boat and an American destroyer provided the pretext for persuading Congress to approve American warships protecting Allied merchant ships and convoys in the American half of the Atlantic in the interests of the "freedom of the seas."

Roosevelt's decision to wage undeclared war on Germany had an impact on two

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crucial decisions made by Hitler. The first of these was the German declaration of war on the United States on December 11, 1941. The introduction of lend-lease had already convinced Hitler that the Soviet Union needed to be defeated quickly, before American resources could be thrown into the fray on the Allied side. The more US naval forces intervened to protect British shipping, the more Hitler began to fear that unless he could unleash the full force of his submarine fleet against them, the battle of the Atlantic would be lost, and his attempt to cut off essential supplies of food, arms and raw materials from the British Isles would fail. Yet he continued to hesitate until the Japanese bombed the US Pacific naval base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This was, Hitler said, a "deliverance." "We can't lose the war," was his response. On December 11, the formal declaration of war on the United States was made.

The German declaration of war freed Roosevelt from his dilemma. Now the United States could enter the conflict openly and without any reservation or holding back. Kershaw asks, Was this a megalomaniacal act of folly on Hitler's part? No, is his answer: War with the United States was inevitable anyway, and the Japanese aggression would tie up American resources in the Pacific, allowing Germany to win the war in Europe before the full might of the US military was brought to bear on the Anglo-Soviet side. Even had Hitler not issued his declaration, the escalating submarine war in the Atlantic would have brought America in sooner rather than later. Hitler's decision, therefore, was not fateful after all—a verdict that, while convincing enough, rather undermines its inclusion in a book titled *Fateful Choices*.

The second decision prompted, at least to some extent, by America's growing involvement in the war, was, however, truly fateful: Hitler's decision to exterminate the Jews of Europe. In a sense, says Kershaw, there was no decision that could be "traced to a single order on a specific day." Certainly, explicit orders have survived from Hitler ordering the mass killing of Polish intellectuals and the ethnic cleansing of Jews from the areas of Poland incorporated into Germany after the German invasion of September 1939.

In 1941 Hitler's orders were less explicit, but according to Kershaw, the wide powers he gave to SS chief Heinrich Himmler, to "pacify" the newly conquered areas and kill Soviet political commissars and Jews who posed a security threat, were decisive. By early August 1941 Himmler's task forces and police units were indiscriminately massacring Jewish men, women and children in vast numbers, in a process of which Hitler was kept well informed.

In October 1941 the Nazi authorities began the eastward deportation of Jews from Berlin, Prague, Vienna and other Central European cities, sending them to ghettos into which vast numbers of Polish and East European Jews had already been forced, living in rapidly deteriorating conditions. Meanwhile, the shooting of Jews by the "task forces" and police units reached new heights. Himmler began to try to resolve the situation by using poison gas as a quicker method of murdering people in large numbers: first in mobile vans, then through the construction of stationary facilities in extermination camps, beginning with Belzec in November 1941. To this degree, at any rate, the pace of events was beginning to force the Nazi leadership to make a fundamental decision and coordinate the program of killing in an orderly way—hence the decision to call a conference of the leading administrative agencies involved, at the Berlin suburb of Wannsee, in November 1941, postponed to January 1942 because of the declaration of war on the United States.

Hitler's declaration of war on the United States freed Roosevelt to enter the conflict without any reservation or holding back.

Speaking privately to Nazi leaders the day after the declaration of war on America, Hitler made it clear that "the world war is here. The annihilation of the Jews must be the necessary consequence." Reporting the speech to his underlings a few days later, the Governor-General of Poland, Hans Frank, was brutally explicit: "We must destroy the Jews wherever we find them." There were 3.5 million in his area alone. "We can't shoot these 3.5 million Jews," he said; "we can't poison them, but we must be able to take steps that will somehow lead to success in extermination." The decision had clearly been made, and it had been made by Hitler.

It is surprising, given the structure of this book, that in explaining Hitler's invasion of Russia, Kershaw does not give more prominence to Roosevelt's decision to bring about the de facto entry of the United States into the war. Through the summer and fall of 1941, Hitler repeatedly referred to what he saw as a malign worldwide Jewish conspiracy driving Roosevelt into an unholy alliance with Churchill and Stalin to bring about the destruction of Germany. All three statesmen, he believed, were under Jewish influence; and his private statements were backed up by anti-American propaganda pumped out by Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry in Berlin. Here is a link that Kershaw might have made more of.

As it turns out, therefore, not all the decisions analyzed in this book were fateful, and not all of them were, strictly speaking, decisions. But they were all connected in one way or another, and there is no doubt that together they helped determine the course of the war. Of course, one could easily pick alternative choices to the ten analyzed in this book, from British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's declaration of war on Germany in September 1939 to Hitler's refusal to let the German Ninth Army withdraw from Stalingrad at the end of 1942, from Churchill's order to bomb German cities the following year to the various decisions made by the key conspirators in the German Resistance's plot to kill Hitler in 1944, and so on. In the end, Kershaw does not really bother to argue for the fundamental importance of the period from May 1940 to November 1941 in shaping the course of the war; he knows that history isn't as simple as that. The way, indeed, would seem open for him to write a sequel, or even two sequels, to this book, covering the years 1942–43 and 1944–45. They would be well worth reading.

Such books, focusing on decision-making by wartime leaders, would seem at first sight to be far removed from the kind of social history in which Ian Kershaw began his career. But in some ways this contrast is deceptive. Kershaw nods in the direction of the individual in history: The "fateful choices" of Mussolini, Churchill, Hitler, Stalin and the rest, he says, "were directly determined by the sort of individuals they happened to be. At the same time, though," he goes on, "they were not made in a vacuum as arbitrary whims of personality. They were choices made under preconditions and under external constraints." One cannot help feeling that the personalities of the men who made the choices do not really interest Kershaw very much. In the end, then, this book is less about the fateful choices they made than about the factors that constrained them. That is precisely what lifts it out of the rut of ordinary military history and puts it into a class of its own. ■

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Pain in the back leads innovative businessman to create a new wallet design.

By John Fleming

When Michael Lyons visited his local chiropractor with severe lower back pain three years ago, he didn't expect the medical advice he was given: "Lose your wallet," his chiropractor told him. The doctor explained that sitting on a solid inch of plastic, leather, and paper over the years had contributed to his patient's back problems.

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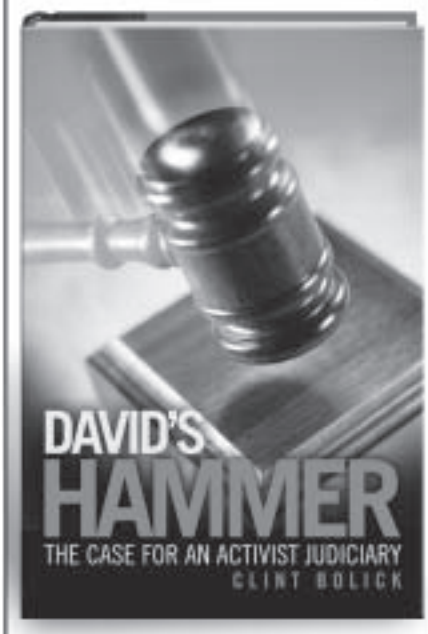

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Stop Making Sense

COLIN FLEMING

THE LAST SOVIET AVANT-GARDE: OBERIU—Fact, Fiction, Metafiction.
By Graham Roberts. Cambridge. 291 pp. Paper $45.
OBERIU: An Anthology of Russian Absurdism.
Edited by Eugene Ostashevsky. Northwestern. 258 pp. $22.95.

"Art is a cupboard," writer Daniil Kharms declared on behalf of the riotous aesthetes known as OBERIU in late 1920s Leningrad, understatement hardly being a hallmark of a group whose acronym stood for "The Association of Real Art." With a penchant for commandeering student hostels, army barracks and the meeting rooms of classical music societies for their Absurdist productions, OBERIU in full-scale performance mode was not to be tussled with lightly: Russian literature was ripe to be remade, and woe to anyone in the Stalinist era who believed a Pushkin novel was enough to get them through the night any longer.

This performance, which has become central to OBERIU (pronounced *O-burr-oo*) lore, took place at Leningrad's Press Club in late January 1928. True to his word, Kharms was rolled out on stage perched atop an enormous cupboard, upon which he remained as he read his verse and declaimed some of the group's favorite sayings. "Poems aren't pies," he announced, to blank stares, dubious sloganeering counting for something of an OBERIU virtue. "We aren't herring!"

Next up was poet Nikolay Zabolotsky, who elected to recite while standing beside a trunk, dressed in grimy military attire. He then was upstaged by his rival, Aleksandr Vvedensky, who came bolting out of the wings on a tricycle, which he dismounted with an acrobatic flourish in order to more comfortably expound on the nature of death (his favorite topic). Kharms's relentlessly violent play *Elizaveta Bam* followed, and the evening was brought to a close with the screening of the not-so-subtle experimental movie *Film No. I: Meatgrinder* and a brief—very brief—question-and-answer session. Reaction was unfavorable, to say the least. Before long, press notes deriding OBERIU performances were commonplace in Leningrad, with one wag alleging that the group couldn't even throw a proper scandal.

Scandal, though, was only one of the group's aims. More broadly, the OBERIU writers sought to create pure narrative, a world where an inspired screed, a compendium of bodily abuses, faux prayers or an incantation for death could serve—or at least be posited—as stories that stand on their own, without familiar signposts like plot lines or established settings. Their writings don't have much in the way of chronology, and a character's actions are not necessarily reasonable reactions to what happens around him. OBERIU's program did not endear the writers to the Soviet press, but the group's latter-day boosters—literary scholars with a predilection for arcana, or bona fide zealots—have hailed the Oberiuty as linguistic vandals hacking away at form and readers' expectations in a manner some have termed Absurdist, others Dadaist.

Under constant attack, its leaders deemed subversive reactionaries by the Stalinist state, OBERIU lasted two and a half years—or less, depending on where you stand on who belonged to the group and whose absence rendered it nonexistent—from late 1927 until spring 1930. Its members rarely published any verse or stories for adult market publications, and wrote instead for children's magazines, a blind for some of the most experimental work in the Stalinist era. Zabolotsky, the principal writer of the group's manifesto—which promised no less than a new proletarian artistic culture, courtesy of the avant-garde—couldn't stand the verse of Vvedensky—no matter that Vvedensky's work, along with Kharms's, best typified the OBERIU ethos of form-busting narrative and upheaval of established traditions. Then there was the far-from-negligible problem that the collective's foremost novelist—its only novelist, really—distanced himself from his compatriots at every opportunity and took up with any association, club, cause or critic who might further his career, while failing to appear at most OBERIU performances.

Colin Fleming's work has appeared in Spin, Metropolis *and the* San Francisco Chronicle. *He is finishing his first novel.*

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All in all, it scarcely seems credible that this perverse literary sect could contribute anything to history, let alone jump-start an approach to fiction where form is perpetually in flux and narrative emerges through gaps, innuendoes and texts that look less like proper stories and more like staccato bursts of code hiding rich new possibilities for brave readers and writers alike.

Graham Roberts's *The Last Soviet Avant-Garde* does a nice job of untangling the story of the early days of OBERIU, leading us back to a group known as "Radiks," a drama student venture featuring Vvedensky and Kharms that produced exactly one work, the Absurdist play *My Mum Is Covered in Watches*, before going the way of so many wayward scholastic ventures. The duo then set off in search of recruits, giving rise to the group Left Flank—in effect OBERIU in its earliest form. ("Left" was a particularly charged word in Stalinist Russia a mere decade after the October Revolution, and a thinly veiled allusion both to Trotskyism and experimental art.) As a result, the prestigious Press Club appearance itself was in jeopardy until the name was changed. Kharms stumped for OBERIU, and the group billed the evening as "Three Left Hours": a bit of cheek, a bit of a pun and a bit of retaliation. The Oberiuty were never much for compromise.

Roberts commences his weighty study—the book was published in 1997; a paperback version was released last summer—with Kharms and Vvedensky, friends whose fates were to remain forever intertwined. Born a year apart, they died within a few months of each other, victims of Stalin's purges. Their writings form the core of the recently released *OBERIU: An Anthology of Russian Absurdism*, a fine supplement to Roberts's highly theoretical musings.

Kharms was a tall man who dressed the part of an English dandy, sorely taxing his limited income—which derived from the sale of stories and verse to children's magazines—in his quest to acquire as many outrageous hats as possible. The name Kharms, one of more than thirty pseudonyms he used, was an oblique homage to Sherlock Holmes, Kharms's favorite literary character—which makes one wonder if the fictitious brother Kharms would sometimes "impersonate" was supposed to be Mycroft. For his part, Vvedensky was short and anything but a dandy, with a mouth full of rotten teeth. In verse and life, his chief interests were threefold: time, death, God. And as a secondary concern, fire, which one could trace back to death easily enough. Vvedensky loved obliteration—all the paths and methods that lead to death—in every conceivable form.

Both men spent their lives reading each other's work, and despite some overlap in their philosophies, their art is a study in contrasting ideologies. For Vvedensky, life existed only insofar as it prefigured death; since death claimed all, it claimed life—so you might as well write poetry about it before you go under, an undertaking that would at least bring you closer to God. Kharms's notebooks reveal a man of a similarly devout religious passion, though one far more inclined to caprice and whimsy: Besides Doyle, his favorite authors included Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, madcap orchestrators of comic dreams like Kharms himself, and Goethe, Blake, Gustav Meyrink and the more macabre—and decidedly attuned to black humor—Knut Hamsun (whose *Hunger* mirrored Kharms's own impoverished circumstances toward the end of his life, when he was unable to secure work even for the children's market—a weird little irony considering how much Kharms despised children).

Given the difficulties and frustrations in his life—freewheeling, subversive poets weren't exactly extolled as dignitaries in Stalinist Russia, where repression and brutality at the hands of the secret police were commonplace—violence became Kharms's literary stock in trade. One never knows where it will come from next in his work (it is almost always abrupt) or how many heads will roll. Even the very forms of literature are handled violently: Narratives are quashed before they really have a chance to begin, with the narrator chastising the reader to pay attention, to intuit, to do away with, once and for all, expectations as to what should happen in a story or what is permissible. The rat-a-tat subject-verb structuring of "Mashkin Killed Koshkin," for instance, leads to a resolution as anti-resolution, a story broken off with a jolt and statement of plain fact as anticlimax, loose ends left to dangle for perpetuity:

> Comrade Mashkin kicked comrade Koshkin under the stomach and gave him another punch on the back of the head.
>
> Comrade Koshkin spread himself out on the floor and died.
>
> Mashkin killed Koshkin.

Or, as the narrator declares in "They Call Me the Capuchin"—after proposing that all infants be deposited in cesspits—"I would have written more of the knowledge within me, but unfortunately I have to go to the shop for tobacco." Then the story breaks off, leaving the reader to wonder

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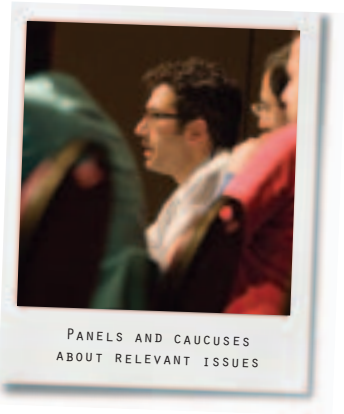

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who else our good man might spurn on his way to the tobacconist's.

And when violence wouldn't do, Kharms opted for satire, which could be violent in itself, and certainly paradoxical. "Anecdotes From the Life of Pushkin" is a wicked skewering of the Russian master, despite the fact that he was one of Kharms's favorite authors:

> 4. When Pushkin broke his legs, he started to go about on wheels. His friends used to enjoy teasing Pushkin and grabbing him by his wheels. Pushkin took this very badly and wrote abusive verses about his friends. He called these verses "epigrams"….
>
> 6. Pushkin liked to throw stones. If he saw stones, then he would start throwing them. Sometimes he would fly into such a temper that he would stand there, red in the face, waving his arms and throwing stones. It really was rather awful!
>
> 7. Pushkin had four sons and they were all idiots. One of them couldn't even sit on his chair and kept falling off. Pushkin himself was not very good at sitting on his chair either, to speak of it. It used to be quite hilarious: They would be sitting at the table; at one end Pushkin would keep falling off his chair, and at the other end—his son. One wouldn't know where to look.

Kharms loved subverting the texts of the old, beloved masters (one story is built entirely on Gogol and Pushkin tripping over each other: "It seems I've stumbled over Gogol!" "Pushkin!"). But more important, Kharms focused on the relationship between reader and author. This relationship was not limited to the text at hand but comprised the associations conjured in the reader's mind. Kharms's art was the art of what would later be called intertextuality, the play of cross-reference and appropriation. Doubtless the Russian reader of the age was well aware of Pushkin and his standing in the pantheon, and that he represented the writing of the Silver Age glory years. Glibness was thus a veritable affront to a literary way of life. And for the reader who hasn't a clue about Pushkin and couldn't care less, a microtext emerges all the same—what we might call a short short today—where tomfoolery occasions a cartoonish poetry whose appeal is less its parade of images than its use of hollow aggrandizement and mock sympathy to slyly flout a subtext. "He called these verses 'epigrams.'" "It really was rather awful!" "One wouldn't know where to look." But we do, it wasn't and as for epigrams, who needs them? This is the way we do things now.

Vvedensky was less interested in satire than Kharms, with the exception of the labyrinthine story "Minin and Pozharsky," which at one point apes Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, with Gogol's always plotting major now reduced, in Vvedensky's creation, to promising loans of fire and muffs—what a combo—to all the attractive women around him.

Vvedensky's poems sear, a feeling Western readers will be able to experience firsthand next year, when Green Integer Books publishes *An Invitation for Me to Think: Poems*, the first collection of the poet's work to appear in English. Ruminations on faith and loss abound, but there are few more churning, lacerating and willfully beautiful works in Eastern literature than the prose poem "Frother," in which three sons hover and cavort around their dying father, trying to ascertain the meaning of a mysterious word and a mysterious truth:

> The sons stop dancing, because it can't all be fun and games, can it. They sit mutely and quietly by their father's expired bed. They look into his wilting eyes. They wish to repeat everything. The father is dying. He becomes fleshy like a bunch of grapes. We are terrified to look into his, so to speak, face. The sons say nothing as each of them enters his own superstitious wall.
>
> Frother is the cold froth forming on the dead man's brow. It is the dew of death, that's what Frother is.

That "so to speak" might as well be engraved on the scythe of the reaper, for it captures the informal language of terror: invulnerable to precise expression, upending the protests of any and all rhetoric in the face of but one possible outcome. Arguments and turns of phrase do not matter here. The fix is in; it is dying time. One of the sons desperately demands that the father be brought fire, as if its elemental opposite, water, could only fail in restoring any degree of health in this hellish realm. Meanwhile, the father has turned into a pillow. Forms are subverted, forms die:

> The pillow, who is also the father:
>
> A little patience,
> Then maybe I'll answer all your
> questions.
> I'd like to hear you sing.
> Then maybe I'll grow loquacious.
>
> I'm so exhausted.
> Maybe art will give me a second wind.
> Farewell, pedestal.
> I wish to hear your voices set to music.

The three sons then break into song, with

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the chorus, "Everyone lies. Everyone dies": fanfare for an earthly hell.

Only fifty or so of Vvedensky's works survive—he made little effort to preserve his writings, discarding or simply losing the scraps of paper bearing all but his most recent compositions. Still, what is undeniable from any sampling of his writings is that he understood the journey to death as both stately procession and full-on, piss-taking laugh-fest, as though the harder you laugh, the harder you die, and dying is what it's all about anyway.

In *Christmas at the Ivanovs'*—which Roberts considers a play to be read aloud—there are no Ivanovs but another family named Puzyrev. It is, at least, Christmas Eve. The stage directions inform us that the Puzyrev children are bathing in a tub that is quite literally a picture drawn on a piece of cardboard. One of the "girls," 32-year-old Sonya, utters a few lines of sexual innuendo, prompting the children's nanny to behead her. Sonya's head and body eventually enter into a dialogue, just after a wolf, a lion and a giraffe hold forth on the nature of time and death. When Sonya's body is discovered, her parents decide to copulate in front of it, a dicey bit of staging. Lest the incredulous reader conclude, however, that this is little more than shock theater done up Russian-style, Vvedensky takes us right into the guts of language—with an ever-narrowing, ever-winnowing progression of specificity paring each object to its elements. Language here works as an architectonic dialogue of sense, sound, intonation of breath and the very shapes and sizes of words themselves:

> A table. On the table is a coffin. In the coffin is Sonya Ostrova. In Sonya Ostrova is a heart. In the heart is congealed blood. In the blood are red and white corpuscles. And, of course, ptomaine.
>
> Of course.

Kharms and Vvedensky marched on as OBERIU's *reductio ad absurdum* high knights, but according to Roberts, no one better typified the group's credo to strip language of its pretenses and move reader ever closer to writer—even if he did have little to do with the group's performances—than the poet/novelist born Konstantin Wagenheim in 1899.

Wagenheim was a wide-eyed romantic in his early days, with a passion for collecting ephemera like penny dreadful magazines, cigar boxes and movie-star pinups. Then there was what could only have been a boon to any Absurdist artist—and one who just happened to be an ardent linguist—when the family changed its surname to something more suitably Russian. And so it was that somewhere back in the Temple of Letters even Cunégonde herself must have blushed as the poet thenceforth known to history as Vaginov was unleashed upon the world.

While Kharms was being rolled out onstage atop his cupboard, Vaginov (who courted critical favor and never veered from what best served his reputation) remained at home, working on his first novel, *The Goat's Song*, an occasional roman à clef tapping his experiences as a member of OBERIU. The prominent Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin—a powerfully influential critic for the Leningrad writers—was quick to acclaim Vaginov's poetics, and Vaginov's subsequent novels, coincidentally enough, began to espouse more and more of Bakhtin's theories. These books exemplified Bakhtin's idea of the novel as a dialogue of many voices, from the various states of mind of its characters to the reader's own reactions, to the theories of the writer himself. In Vaginov's work, narrative voices vie to drown one another out in a collective din. Instead of a single voice, we get something much more cluttered, something like white noise.

Unlike Kharms and Vvedensky, both of whom lived in constant fear of Stalin's terror and ultimately lost their lives to it, Vaginov waged his principal battle against more natural causes. With tuberculosis plaguing his lungs and only a few years to master his art, Vaginov evolved from unsteady poet to sublime prose stylist with remarkable speed, yielding four novels, each more daring than the last. His final novel, *Harpagoniana*, is the closest Russian literature has ever come to *Finnegans Wake*, only with nothing approaching the respite granted by the river Liffey flowing into the sea.

In *Harpagoniana*, a story of people trafficking in kitsch, actual and verbal, each strand of narrative—uttered for brief, fitful moments by one character after another—is endlessly embedded in the whole. Stories are told within stories, and within further stories, constructed from words found on the back of matchboxes and snatches of overheard conversations. Anyone a character encounters begins his own story; some try to decode the narratives swirling around them, becoming readers themselves. This is the novel as a million found texts, a chain letter of narrative addressed to both character and reader—whose fundamental difference, as in Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (published in 1979, forty-five years after Vaginov's death), is that one happens to be in the book and the other is holding it. Each one is left to fashion a response, a story, of his own, be it curious, dismissive, fun, necessary, begging for mercy or escapist (e.g., "I was reading this

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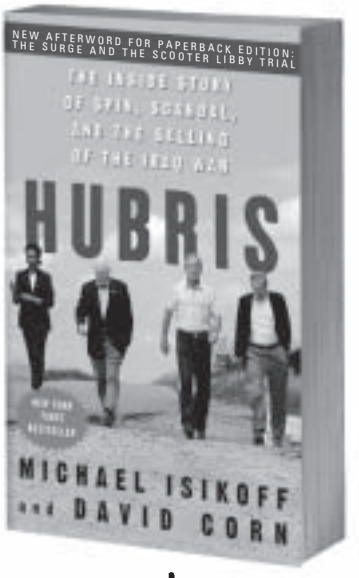

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book, and I had to get the hell away from it"). One section in particular makes Beckett's *Endgame* seem almost like an outtake from a Disney script: An alcoholic goes to a bar. He walks into the lavatory, where a group of friends are sharing anecdotes on drunkenness, each and every one of which is revealed, in full, in the text. At this point, the saga of the alcoholic is dropped entirely from the novel, the poor fellow sentenced for all eternity to a room of filth and human excrement, where tall tales abound. Drink hearty, lads.

In a sense, Vaginov's tuberculosis, which killed him in 1934, was a case of good fortune in Stalin's Russia. Vvedensky and Kharms were not so lucky. Vvedensky was sent to a Soviet labor camp in late 1941 on charges of treason and died of dysentery along the way. Kharms was imprisoned in a psychiatric ward, where he died, probably from starvation, in February 1942. For the next few decades, the Oberiuty were largely forgotten, until a brief period in the 1960s when overlooked comic subversives, from Laurel and Hardy to the Marx Brothers to Kharms and Vvedensky, were celebrated in the Western world, and the Soviet Union was slowly starting to resurrect writers who had become casualties of Stalinist repression. Vaginov's rediscovery required a few extra years—the spark was an academic conference in Estonia—but he now stands as an exemplar of Russian Modernism, decades ahead of his time.

For all of the misfortune and tragedy that befell the core OBERIU writers, theirs was a movement marked by small miracles, from Vaginov's ability to stave off death long enough to finish his masterpiece, to Kharms's and Vvedensky's knack—or just dumb luck—for surviving the purges as long as they did, to the scene that followed Kharms's abduction: Pulling an empty sled across the snow-covered streets of Leningrad during the first winter of the German blockade, Kharms's close friend Yakov Druskin, ravaged by dystrophy, made his way to the rooms of Kharms's wife. She handed him a suitcase, which he fastened to his sled, and trundled off into the Russian night, taking with him the papers of Kharms and Vvedensky, which have somehow made their way down to us. Among the lines from Vvedensky:

> The worm crawls along behind us all,
> he carries monotony with him.
> I'm scared to be an uncertainty,
> I regret that I am not fire.

How well the true poet lights into his verse, regrets be damned, and how keenly Death itself is made to feel the conflagration when confronted with deathless art. ■

ART

Cinema Studies

ARTHUR C. DANTO

While there is little question that photography is the central medium in Jeff Wall's arresting works, one would hardly consider him a photographer. For one thing, he makes use of certain strategies that derive from cinema, so that he describes his typical works explicitly as cinematographic, rather than documentary, photographs. For another, though the characters, as we may call the men and women he photographs, clearly belong to the same world his viewers do, their formal relationships to one another seem based on conventions of painting, especially nineteenth-century French painting. It is as if twenty-first-century men and women, wearing jeans and T-shirts and living in twenty-first-century rooms, are enacting, in *tableaux vivants*, scenes as they might have been composed by Degas or Manet. Wall, whose traveling retrospective was recently on view at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, is an art historian as well as an artist, who has been a painter, a photographer and a filmmaker. He is also steeped in contemporary theory, though it is not necessary either to know his history or to interpret his works in light of the theories that underpin them. Still, one cannot penetrate very deeply into an exhibition of his work without realizing that some more complex aesthetics are involved than apply to the separate media he brings together in constructing his images. In this respect, his art is very much of the present moment, not only in subject but in mode of representation.

COURTESY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

***Milk*, 1984**

Let's consider the first work in the show (which reopens at the Art Institute of Chicago at the end of June), *The Destroyed Room*, roughly the size of a small billboard, and done in 1978. As a cinematographic photograph, it is intended to imply an interpretive narrative, by contrast with a "documentary photograph," which records an independent reality. The room itself is entirely banal, in décor as well as cheap furniture—a chest of drawers, a bed and a bamboo table or chair. There is no ornamentation—no moldings, for example—and the walls are painted in the kind of color a paint manufacturer might call "fiesta red." But the door is off its hinges, the curtain rods hang diagonally across the single square window. The floor is strewn with costume jewelry as well as shoes and garments that are clearly feminine. There are no "personal touches" like pictures or posters on the wall, apart from the figurine of a female dancer on the bureau, left undisturbed. The person symbolically expressed by the room is feminine, and the destruction is definitely the symbolic expression of a very different self, who has committed an act of aggression against the room's tenant. It is not the outcome of a natural disaster, like an earthquake or a hurricane. The drawers have been pulled out, the mattress has been slashed, the garments have been flung, the bamboo chair or table has been smashed. The room has either been searched by spies or police who

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wanted the returning tenant to know that they had been there—or destroyed in an act of rage or frustration by an angry lover.

All these conjectures have to be put in parentheses when we realize that the photograph does not document an actual episode. It is a theater or, more likely, a movie set, fabricated to represent a scene of violent disarray. It is filled with signs of deliberate artificiality; indeed, artificiality is part of the work's content. *The Destroyed Room* may look like a forensic shot, but in fact it merely mimics one. One quickly realizes that the artist has brought together various articles from daily life and composed them deliberately to look like the result of willed mayhem. It is a "destroyed room" only insofar as it makes us believe it is one. It tells the kind of story that a movie would tell. It mocks the somewhat discredited genre of "staged photography."

Staged photography grew out of the polemical dialogue between photography and painting that continued well into our time. In 1839 the painter Paul Delaroche, learning that Louis Daguerre had invented a way of preserving photographic images on metal plates, declared that painting was dead. What was the point of learning manually to copy reality through drawing or painting when a perfect reproduction could now be achieved by mechanical means that anyone could master? Defending their suddenly embattled medium, painters replied that photographs could only reproduce the world passively, whereas paintings are uniquely able to show invented scenes and sights, through acts of creative imagination. Before long, however, photographers proved that they too could show imaginary events. The Victorian photographer Henry Peach Robinson used human models to enact sentimental scenes that he then photographed to create salon-type images in such cloying works as *Fading Away*, in which a young girl is shown dying in the presence of grieving family members. Robinson ought, Wall argues, to have used the best paintings of his day—by Degas, for example—instead of the "salon trash" he actually travestied. Film showed a way in which staged photography could be revived that would enable the photographer to create his or her own "perfect moment" instead of stalking the world in the hope that such a moment would materialize. Wall describes the quest that led to *The Destroyed Room* in an interview with James Rondeau included in the exhibition catalogue:

> I had the feeling that it was possible to bring much of what I'd liked in the

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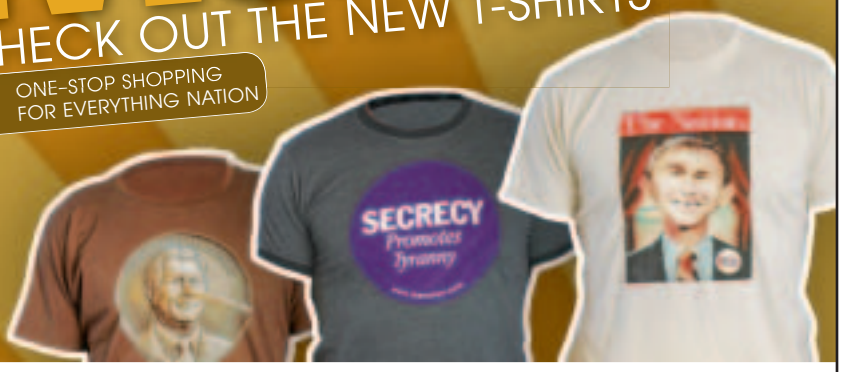

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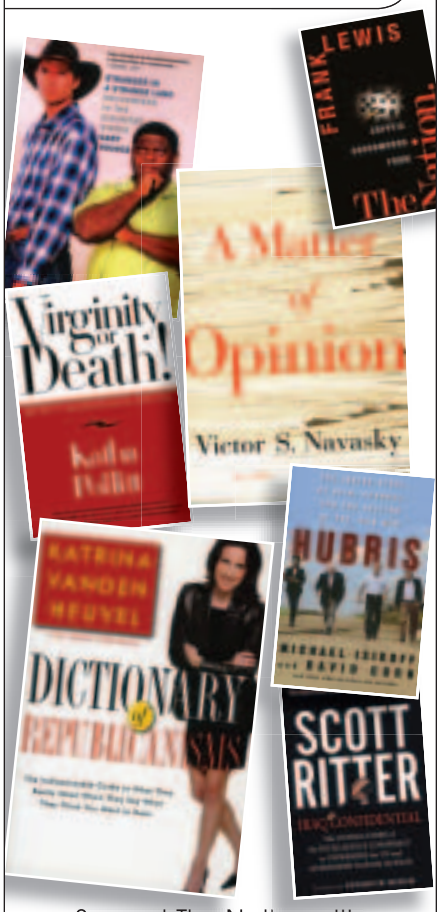

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> cinema of the 1960s and 1970s together with what I'd always liked about painting in a form of photography that, whatever faults it might have, would not start out accepting the existing canon. That was an intuition born out of seven or eight years of struggle, intellectual, emotional, artistic struggle, when I couldn't find my own way and went through periods of real desperation.

I'd like to stress how decisively against the grain of Clement Greenberg's characterization of the Modernist agenda this is. Greenberg contended that each of the arts should protect the boundaries of its medium, and exclude anything that belonged by rights to a different medium. Wall violated the boundaries of several different media (painting, photography and cinema) and even went back into the early Modernist painting of the nineteenth century—in order to find what he needed to address the subjects that concerned him. It is this, in my view, that makes him, along with William Kentridge, one of the paradigmatic artists of our age.

There is one further component in Wall's fusion of heterogeneous media. It consists in a borrowing from commercial display art the kind of photograph we know from the glass-enclosed posters mounted on the sides of bus shelters. This recommended itself to him for two reasons—size and luminosity. The medium that enabled him to realize the large photographic works that define his vision is the color transparency, illuminated from behind by fluorescent bulbs. The translucency inherent in the nature of slide film enabled Wall to achieve a luminosity the old masters could only dream of.

This technique enabled him, in fact, to make works reminiscent of projected images familiar to us from art history lectures. Wall cannot but be aware, as an art historian, of the discrepancy between the magic lantern effect of slides shown in darkened rooms and the relatively drab surfaces of pigmented cloth, however highly varnished, on museum walls. Since Wall worked closely with MoMA curator of photography Peter Galassi to select the show, *The Destroyed Room*, as the earliest of his works to have been included, must have been the first or among the first works he regarded as successful in incorporating his demanding aesthetic. It was originally shown in the display window of an art gallery, transformed into a kind of light box, in Wall's native city, Vancouver, where he still lives. There, passersby, completely ignorant of the theories that went into the work, would be able to give themselves over to interpreting the image seen through window glass. My sense—I can only speculate—is that they saw it, as I do, in terms of violence and transgressed privacy. The weight of abstract theory falls away, leaving a set of entirely human meanings, accessible to ordinary men and women witnessing, in a shop window, the cluttered spectacle of personal space invaded. The frilled intimate garments spilled out of rifled bureau drawers convey, immediately, the feeling of personal vulnerability. I would hate to think that the immediate response was that what the photograph showed was merely staged.

Later, Wall would use portable metal light boxes that, thanks to their scale and the intensity of their illumination, create an effect not unlike dioramas in the Museum of Natural History—only the re-enacted scenes are of human life. Interestingly, especially in the earlier pieces, the fraught concept of home and shelter plays a central role. *An Eviction* (1988/2004) shows just that: a man forcibly hustled out of his house by sheriffs, as a woman runs out of the house, her arms extended toward the struggling trio. The drama is seen from a distance, perhaps through a window on the second floor of a house down the block on the other side of the street in a lower-middle-class neighborhood, around noon on a sunny day in midsummer, with cars parked here and there and the neighbors going about their business. The tiny figures have the seeming defenselessness of snails removed from their shells. In *Milk* (1984), a homeless man, bearded and sockless, sits on the sidewalk, his back (literally) to a brick-faced wall, his jaw clenched, holding a container of milk in a paper sack with such tension that the milk is squeezed up and out in an angry, ejaculatory spurt.

There is not a lot to say about these simulated events. They speak for themselves. The couple under eviction is about to lose a home, the frustrated derelict has already lost his. Their worlds are empty and pitiless. In *Doorpusher* (1984) a man, shown from above, is pushing lethargically against a door. The window is boarded up, or perhaps covered in cardboard. He is, one supposes, looking for shelter, without much hope or conviction. In *Trân Dúc Ván*, a Vietnamese man leans against a tree, looking upward, next to a faceless wall, while a middle-aged woman walks past him, paying no heed. His homelessness is more diffuse, and more hopeless. In another work, *The Storyteller* (1986), a foreign-looking man sits alone

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on some rocks on an embankment in the shadow of an overpass, while at a distance a couple relaxes at the edge of the woods and a man sits on the ground, talking to two young people by a flickering bonfire. It is no *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. The isolated seated figure is excluded from the spell of the story.

Wittgenstein imagined a book called *The World as I Found It* and wondered, philosophically, how it would describe the presence of the self in that world. *The World as I Found It* would be a good title for Wall's work, since he is really present everywhere in it. For all his immersion in structuralist and poststructuralist theory, one feels—at least I do—that what he was searching for was a way of showing the world as he found it. No single existing medium would have done the trick. But he did not document the world, though some of his work, his so-called documentary photographs, certainly does that. For the cinematographic photographs, he created models of aspects of the world he found, and then photographed those. He was producer, director, writer, best boy and cameraman, who also handled the lighting and cast the actors and found the props and did the editing. He was in this respect like Cindy Sherman, though he rarely photographed himself. He didn't need to. The world he shows is his vision objectified, even if he is literally outside it, as in a scene with well-behaved boys and girls at a birthday party, *A ventriloquist at a birthday party in October 1947*, done in 1990 of something that would have taken place when he was barely a year old. The title is like one by Diane Arbus. Or the astonishing *Dead Troops Talk (a vision after an ambush of a Red Army Patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, winter 1986)*, done in 1992—a cinematographic photograph if ever there was one, in which, expert viewers will note, he takes advantage of digital montage.

The immense liberation granted by cinematographic photography is that it opens

Even Then Maybe

Not spent those bloodshot friendships those
soul-marriages sealed and torn
those smiles of pain
I told her a mouthful
I shut my mouth against him
Throat thick with tears
how words sound when you swallow
—and under the roof
of the mouth long stroke
reaching from the tongue's root

No, I was not living with her at the time
At the time I was not living
with him, at the time we were living together
I was living with neither of them
—was dwelling you could say
But as for living at that time
we were all living together with many others
for whom living was precisely the question

Haven't seen evenings like that since
vesuvian emerald to brass dissolving
—a sentence you'd waited for
taken back half-spoken—
Luxury even then maybe
evenings like those

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room for showing the imaginary as if it were real, which is what staged photography promised at its inception. One does not even require the artifice so palpable in *The Destroyed Room*, or the staginess of *An Eviction* or *Doorpusher*. One gives oneself license to create sets for photographs, the titles of which refer to scenes from famous novels, like Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* or Yukio Mishima's *Spring Snow*. These are often referred to as "illustrations" in the critical literature on Wall, but they are really stills from unmade movies, or movies one would have made only for the sake of the stills.

Somehow, my favorite work in the show is *Restoration* (1993). It is situated inside a panoramic diorama, in Lucerne. The panorama depicts French soldiers who have taken refuge in Switzerland at the time of the Franco-Prussian War. Wall's extremely elongated image shows some restorers on a scaffolding. One of them is pasting scraps of paper on the surface of the curved painting, between, as it were, the world of the restorers in 1993 and the world of the exhausted troops in 1871. A pensive woman, standing on the scaffold, holding a pencil, daydreams in front of the soldiers filing through the snow, just where, in the photograph, it becomes impossible to distinguish what is indoors and outdoors, past and present, living and dead, art and life. She could stand for the artist himself, with the diorama representing the world as he found it. For what it is worth, Daguerre helped invent the diorama more than a decade before he invented photography. ■

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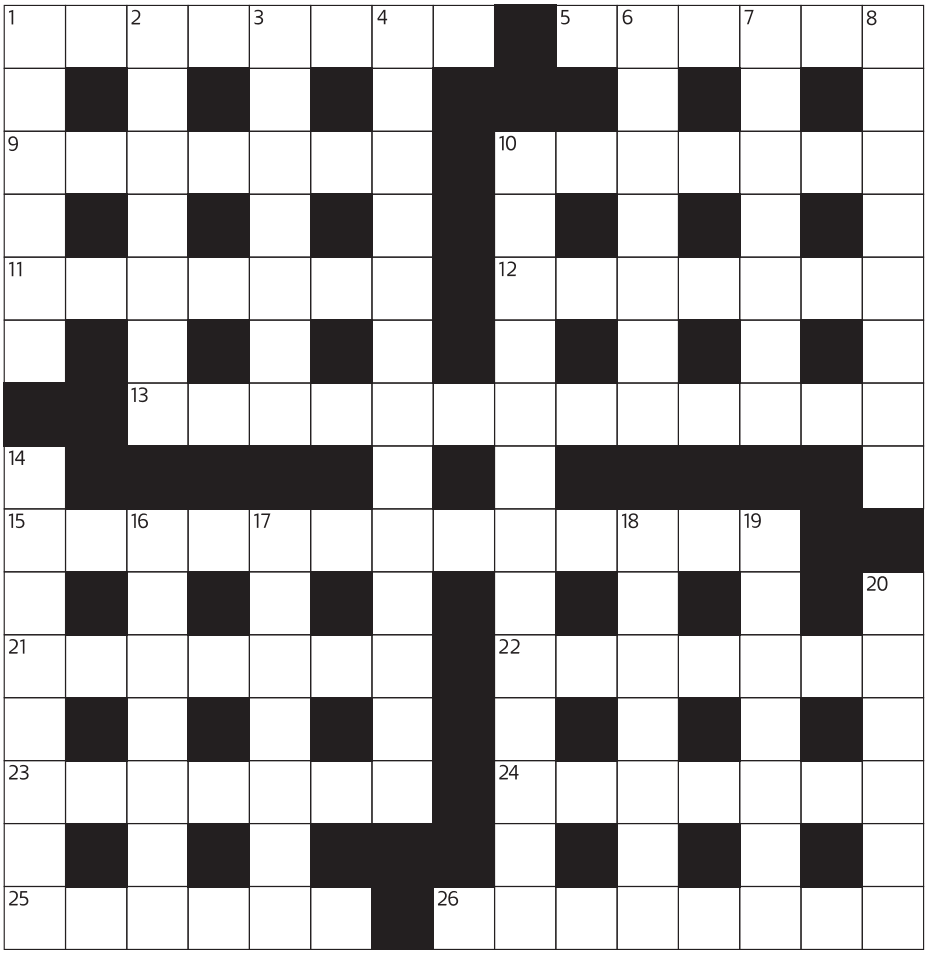


ACROSS

1 George Bernard appeared backward according to those in Oklahoma at one time. (8)

5 The sailor man of song, by the poet Alexander and the outdated type. (6)

9 Change the scheduled path concerning outer transformation. (7)

10 Some dish, with the title turning to the old emperor. (7)

11 A well known production of *Taxi* with a bad rate to conclude it. (7)

12 Like the sea, once CIA got involved. (7)

13 A common feature of the speakeasy type. (13)

15 How *Fiddler on the Roof* started out, according to custom. (13)

21 Sort of wash the Italian one, in a foreign language. (7)

22 Certainly not related to the old song "Remember"—the name's wrong with a category of fitness! (7)

23 Lout was bad! These are the bad guys! (7)

24 In it I always start out first, see? (7)

25 Broken-down diesel passes by. (6)

26 Bleats for 20 might be an example of such. (8)

DOWN

1 Trim a type of pine? (6)

2 One shouldn't be left up in the air with a wrecked car and a splintered boat! (7)

3 You might shift into it, but it's neither here nor there! (7)

4 It's not odd you French ail badly over bows—such things happen, as one expects. (13)

6 The SEC gets mixed up in a broken bone caper, which some consider dirty. (7)

7 A get-together on international scale. (7)

8 Get the devil out! (8)

10 Concerning the Far East at one on a way to get straightened out. (13)

14 It helps to look at your receiving apparatus, possibly to so handle the situation. (8)

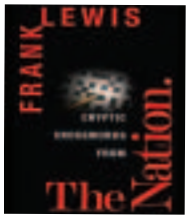
16 Certain flowers in this area can't hit it off! (7)

17 Ape, I tame it badly. (7)

18 Coming down part of the stairs? (7)

19 A religious school? Certainly, and a common greeting to the head of state. (7)

20 What might be picked up at a restaurant with the French—possibly at such to get served. (6)



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T	■	■	■	S	■	E	■	S	■	E	■	L	■	■
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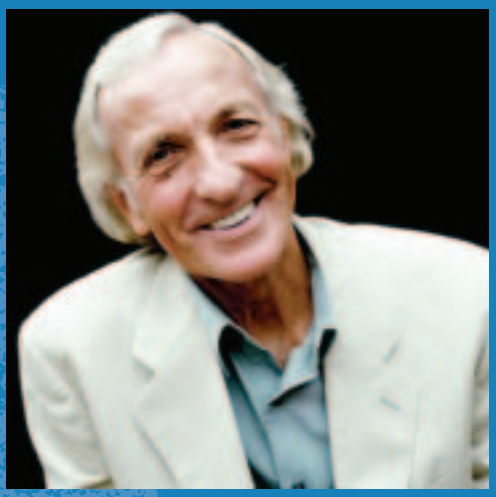

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